

TINY

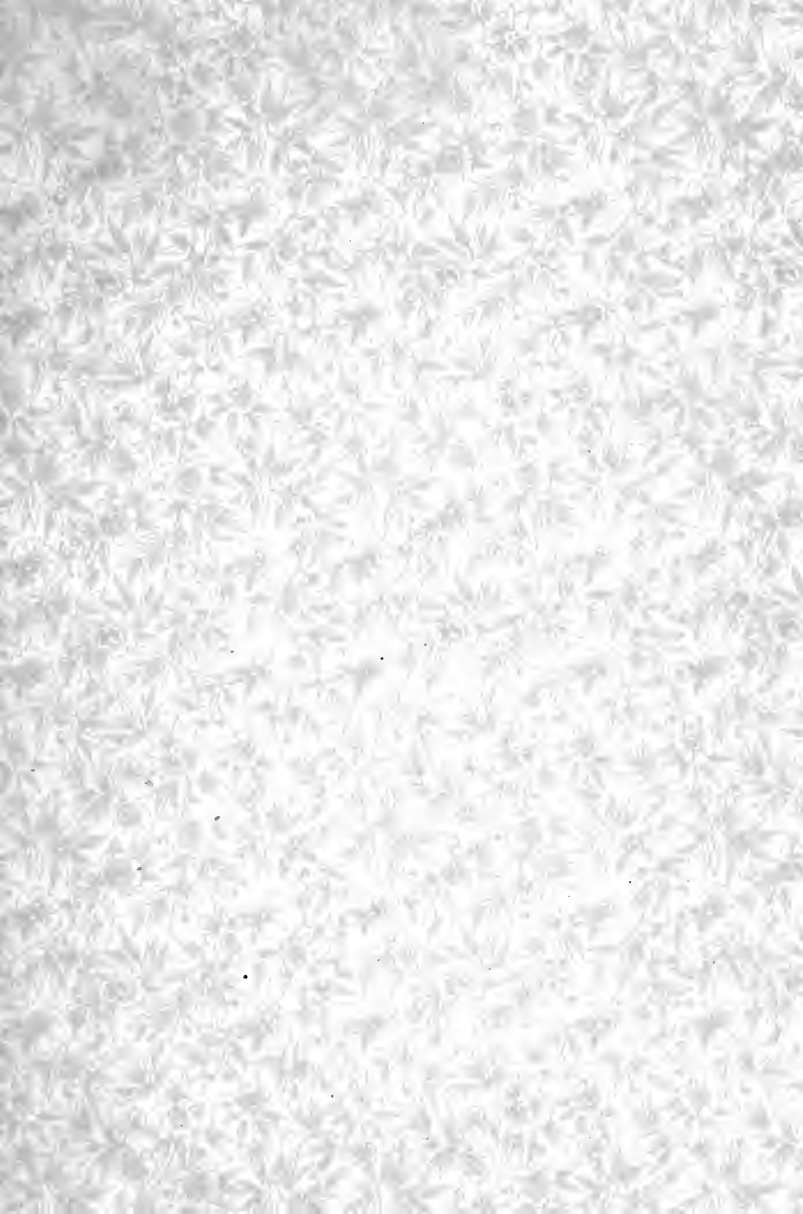
LUTTRELL

E. W. HORNUNG



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TINY LUTTRELL

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

A BRIDE FROM THE BUSH.
UNDER TWO SKIES.

TINY LUTTRELL

BY

ERNEST WILLIAM HORNUNG

VOL. II

CASSELL & COMPANY LIMITED

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TINY LUTTRELL.



CHAPTER XI.

IN THE LADIES' TENT.

AND yet, even at the time she made it, Ruth little dreamt how deeply her confession both galled and revolted her husband. He forgave her very kindly in the end, and that satisfied her lean imagination. Perhaps there was not much to forgive. There was enough, at all events, to trouble Erskine (to whom the best excuse there was for her was the least likely to suggest itself;) but the matter soon ceased to trouble Erskine's wife, because his smile was as good-tempered as before. He seemed, indeed, to think no more about it. When Ruth would speak confidentially of her hopes and wishes for Tiny (as if Erskine had been in her confidence all the time), he

would chat the matter over with interest, which was the next best thing to sympathy. He had to do this oftener than he liked during the next twenty - four hours ; for Ruth really thought that excessive candour now was a more or less adequate atonement for an excessive reserve in the past. Moreover, she genuinely enjoyed talking openly at last of the matter which had concerned her so long and so severely in secret.

“Don’t you think he means it?” she asked her husband, several times.

“I am afraid he thinks he does,” was one of Holland’s answers.

“That’s your way of admitting it,” rejoined Ruth, who could bear his repudiation of her desires for the sake of his assent to her opinion, which Erskine was too honest to withhold. “Of course he means it. Have you noticed how he watches her?”

“I have noticed it once or twice.”

“And did you see him watching his mother, the night we dined there, to see what impression Tiny made upon her?”

“So you spotted that!” Erskine said curiously, not having given his wife the credit for such acute perception. “Well, I own that I did, too; and that was worse than his watching Tiny. This is a youth with a well-known weakness for his mamma. She has probably more influence over him than any other body in the world. I am prepared to bet that it was she, and she alone, who whistled him back from Australia. Now, though she did it partly by her singing—which by the way was rather cheap for our Tiny—there’s no doubt at all about the impression Tiny has made upon Lady Dromard; and that’s the worst of it.”

“The worst of it! as if he was beneath her!” said Ruth mockingly. “Or is it that you think her too terribly beneath him?”

“Tiny,” said Erskine, shaking his head,

"is beneath no man that I have yet come across."

"Then what can you have against it? Is it that you think she will grow so grand that we shall see no more of her? If so, it shows how much you know of our Tiny. Or do you think him too high and mighty to be honest and true? I don't profess to know much about it," continued Ruth scornfully, being stung to eloquence by his perversity, "but I should have said an honest man and his love might be found in a castle, sometimes, as well as in a cottage!"

"Hearts just as pure and fair may beat in Belgrave Square as in the lowly air of Seven Dials," quoted Erskine, with a laugh. "I grant all that; but if you want to know, my point is that Tiny would be thrown away on Belgrave Square! She is far too funny and fresh, and unlike most of us, to thrive in that fine soil; she would need to be clipped and pruned and trimmed in the image of other

people. And that would spoil her. Whatever else she may be, she's more or less original as she stands. She's not a copy now ; but she will have to become one in Belgrave Square."

"She *will* have to become one !" cried Ruth, jumping at the change of mood. "Then you think that Tiny means it, too?"

"I am afraid she means to marry him," said Erskine, with a sigh. "I have visions of our Tiny ours no more, but my Lady Manister, and Countess Dromard in due course."

So delighted was Ruth with his opinion on this point that his other opinions had no power to annoy her ; and in her joy she told him once more, and with much impulsive feeling, how sorry she was for having kept him in the dark so wilfully and so long. She called him an angel of good-temper and forbearance, and undertook to reward his generosity by never hiding another thing from him in her life. And she would never, never vex him again, she said—so earnestly that

he thought she meant it, as indeed she thought herself, for half a minute.

“But you mean to go to the match to-morrow?” he asked her, wistfully.

“Oh, we must—if it’s fine. It’s the last match of the week; besides, Herbert’s going to play.”

This was an argument, and Erskine said no more. The chances are that he would have said no more in any case. The following afternoon Ruth drove with Tiny to the match, and with a particularly light heart, because she had not heard another word against the plan. Her one remaining anxiety was lest it might rain before they got to the cricket-field.

For the day was one of those dull ones of early autumn when there is little wind, a gray sky, and more than a chance of rain; but none had fallen during the morning, which reduced the chance; while the clouds were high, and occasionally parted by faint rays of sunshine.

The ground was so beautiful in itself that it was the greater pity there was no more sun, since without it well-kept turf and tall trees are like a sweet face saddened. The trees were the fine elms of that country, and they flanked two sides of the ground; but one missed their shadows, and the foliage had a dingy, lack-lustre look in the tame light. On the third side a ha-ha formed a natural "boundary," and the red, spreading house stood aloof on the fourth, giving a touch of welcome warmth to a picture whose highest lights were the white flannels of the players and the canvas tents. The tents were many, and admirably arranged; but one beneath the elms had a side of the ground to itself; and thither drove Mrs. Holland, alighting rather nervously as a groom came promptly to the pony's head, because this was the ladies' tent.

To-day, however, the tent was not formidably full, as it had been when the girls had

watched the cricket from it earlier in the week ; this was only the Saturday's match. Ruth looked in vain for Lady Dromard, but received a cold greeting from her daughter Lady Mary, upon whom the guinea-stamp was disagreeably fresh and sharp. The sight of Mrs. Willoughby and her friend Mrs. Foster-Simpson, on a front seat, was a relief at the moment (the sight of anything to nod to is a relief sometimes) ; but Ruth was discreet enough to sit down behind these ladies, not beside them. She congratulated herself on her presence of mind when she heard the tone and character of some of their comments on the game. It would have done Ruth no good to be seen at the side of loud Mrs. Foster-Simpson or of loquacious Mrs. Willoughby, and it might have done Tiny grave harm. Mrs. Willoughby's husband, who had good-naturedly become eleventh man at the eleventh hour, was conspicuous in the field from his black trousers, clerical wide-awake, and shirt-sleeves of gray

flannel. "I hope you admire him," said his wife over her shoulder to Ruth; "I tell him he might as well take a funeral in flannels!"

"Or dine in his surplice," added her friend Mrs. Foster-Simpson, in a voice that carried to the back of the tent.

"I just do admire Mr. Willoughby," Ruth said softly; "he has a soul above appearances."

"You're not his wife," replied the lady who was.

"You may thank your stars!" shouted her too familiar friend.

Little Mrs. Holland turned to her sister and speculated aloud as to the state of the game, but her tone was an example to the ladies in front, who nevertheless did not lower theirs to supply the gratuitous information that the Mundham players had been fielding all day.

"They're getting the worst of it," declared Mrs. Willoughby, perhaps prematurely.

"Do them good!" her friend said viciously,

but with the soft pedal down for once. "There would have been no holding them. That young Dromard now—it will take it out of *him*. He wants it taken out of him!"

Mr. Stanley Dromard, who had been scoring heavily all the week, happened to be in the deep field close to the tent. Ruth nudged her sister, and they moved further along their row, in order to avoid the bonnets in front.

"Horrid people!" whispered Ruth.

"That's the Earl by the canvas screen," answered Tiny. "I should like to send him a new straw hat!"

"Hush!" whispered Ruth, in terror. "You're as bad as they are. Tell me, do you see Herbert?"

"Yes, there he is, all by himself. There's a man out."

"Is there? How tired they seem! That's Lord Manister sprawling on the grass. What a boy he looks! You wouldn't think he was anybody in particular, would you?"

“ I should hope not, indeed, on the cricket field ! ”

“ I only meant he looked rather nice.”

“ Certainly he looks nicer in flannels than in anything else ; his tailor has less to do with it.”

The patience of Ruth was inexhaustible. She watched the game until another wicket fell. Then it was her admiration for the scene that escaped in more whispers.

“ *Isn't* it a lovely place, Tiny ? ”

“ Oh, it's all that.”

“ I've never seen one to touch it, and I have seen two or three, you know, since we were married. But the house is the best part of it all. I would give anything to live in a house like that—wouldn't you ? ”

“ I ? my immortal soul ! ”

And Tiny sighed, but Ruth, looking round quickly, saw laughter in her eyes, and said no more. Tiny was very trying. Was she half in earnest or wholly in jest ? Ruth could never

tell ; and now, while she wondered, a lady who knew her sat down on her right. Ruth was glad enough to shake hands and talk, and not sorry, in this case, to be seen doing so, while at the moment it was a very human pleasure to her to leave Tiny to take care of herself. And that was a thing at which Tiny may be said to have excelled so far as one saw, and no further. The attacks of most tongues she was capable of repelling with distinction ; against those of her own thoughts she made ever the feeblest resistance ; and at this stage of Christina's career, her own thoughts were a swarm of flies upon a wound in her heart. That was the truth—and no one suspected it.

During the next quarter of an hour the innings came to an end, and the fielders trooped over to the group of tents at another side of the ground. Tiny hoped that one of them would have the good taste to come to the ladies' tent and talk to her ; an Eton boy would do very well ; Herbert

would be better than nobody : but she hoped in vain. On her right, Ruth had turned her back, and was quite taken up with the lady with whom she was not sorry to be seen in conversation. The chairs on her left were all empty ; and those flies were fighting for her heart. It was the rustle of silk disturbed them in the end ; and Lady Dromard who sat down in the empty chair on Tiny's left.

“ I am so glad to see you both,” said the Countess as though she meant it ; and she leant over to shake hands with Ruth, whose back was now turned upon her new-found friend. Not so much was said to the pair in front, though those ladies had something to say for themselves. Lady Dromard gave them very small change in smiles, but made the conversation general for a minute or two, with that graceful tact at which, perhaps, she was in a manner a professional. With equal facility she dropped them from her talk one after another, much as the last wickets had fallen in

the match, and until only Tiny was left in. For the Countess had come there expressly to talk to Miss Luttrell, as she herself stated with charming directness.

“I was afraid you were feeling dull; though really you deserve to, Miss Luttrell.”

“I was,” said Tiny, honestly; “but I don’t know what I have done to deserve to, Lady Dromard.”

“It’s the last match, and a poor one, which nobody cares anything about. You should have come earlier in the week.”

“We were here on Wednesday afternoon.”

“But why not oftener? My second son made ninety-three on Thursday. I do wish you had seen that!”

“It wasn’t my fault that I didn’t,” remarked Miss Luttrell. “I suppose things came in the way.”

“Then you are a cricketer!” exclaimed the Countess. “I am glad to hear it, for I am a

great cricketer myself. No, I don't play, Miss Luttrell ; only I know all about it."

Christina candidly confessed that she was not a cricketer in any sense ; that, in fact, she knew very little about cricket ; and the Countess, who considered how many girls would have pretended to know much, was more pleased with this answer than she would have been with an exhibition of real knowledge of the game.

"My only interest in this match, however," explained Lady Dromard, "is in my eldest son. I do so want him to make runs ! He has been dreadfully unsuccessful all the week."

Christina was discreetly sympathetic.

"He is going in first," murmured the Countess presently, in suppressed excitement. "We must watch the match."

So they sat without speaking during the first few overs, and the silence did much for Christina, by putting her at her ease in the hour when she needed all the ease at her command. Cool as

she was outwardly, in her heart she was not a little afraid of Lady Dromard, whose manner towards herself had already struck her as rather too kind and much too scrutinising. She now entertained a perfectly private conviction that Lady Dromard either knew something about her, or had her suspicions. Not that this made Christina particularly uncomfortable at the moment. The Countess had eyes and wits for the game only, following it intently through a heavy field-glass grown light now that Manister was batting.

It was difficult to realise that this eager, animated woman was the mother of the young fellow at the wicket; she looked so very little older than her son; or so it seemed to Tiny, who now had ample opportunity to study not only her face and figure, but her quiet, handsome bonnet and faultless dress. Even Tiny could not help admiring Lady Dromard. Suddenly, however, the hand that held the field-glass was allowed to

drop, and the fine face flushed with disappointment as a round of applause burst from the field and found no echo in the tents.

"Manister is out!" exclaimed the Countess.
"He has only made two or three!"

"How fond she is of him!" thought the girl, still watching her companion's face, which somehow softened Christina towards both mother and son; so that now it was with real sympathy that she remarked, "Poor Lord Manister! I am very sorry."

Some expressions of condolence from the seats in front threw the young girl's words into advantageous relief.

The Countess said presently to Christina, "I am sorry it has turned out so dull a day; the ground looks really nice when it is fine and sunny."

"It is a beautiful ground," answered Tiny, simply; "the trees are so splendid."

"Ah, but you're used to splendid trees."

"In Australia? Well, we are and we are not, Lady Dromard. I mean to say, there are tremendous trees in some parts; in others there are none at all, you know. Up the bush, where we used to live, the trees were of very little account."

"I thought the bush was nothing *but* trees," remarked Lady Dromard; and Christina could not help smiling as she explained the comprehensive character of "the bush."

"So you were actually brought up on a sheep-farm!" said Lady Dromard, looking flatteringly at the graceful young girl.

"Yes—on a station. It was in the bush, and very much the bush," laughed Tiny; "for we were hundreds of miles up-country. But most of the trees were no higher than this tent, Lady Dromard. The homestead was in a clump of pines, and they were pretty tall, but the rest were mere scrub."

"Then how in the world," cried her ladyship,

“did you manage to become educated? What school could you go to in a place like that?”

“We never went to school at all,” Tiny informed her, confidentially. “We had a governess.”

“Ah, and she taught you to sing! I should like to meet that governess. She must be a very clever person.”

Her ladyship's manner was delightfully blunt.

“Now, Lady Dromard you're laughing at me! I know nothing—I have read nothing.”

“I rejoice to hear it!” cried the Countess cordially. “I assure you, Miss Luttrell, that's a most refreshing confession in these days. Only it's too good to be true. I don't believe you, you know.”

Christina made no great effort to establish the truth of her statement; for some minutes longer they watched the game.

But the Countess was not interested, though her younger son had gone in, and had already

begun to score. "What were they?" she said at length, with extreme obscurity; but Christina was polite enough not to ask her what she meant until she had put this question to herself; and while she still hesitated Lady Dromard recollected herself, appreciated the hesitation, and explained. "I mean the trees in the bush, at your farm. Were they gum-trees?"

"Very few of them—there are hardly any gum-trees up there."

"Do you know that *I* have a young gum-tree?" said Lady Dromard, amusingly, as though it were a young opossum.

"No!" said Tiny incredulously.

"But I have, in the conservatory; you might have seen it the other evening."

"How I wish I had!"

The young girl's face wore a flush of genuine animation. Lady Dromard regarded it for a moment, and admired it very much; then she bent forward, and touched Ruth on the arm.

“Mrs. Holland, will you trust your sister to me for half an hour? I want to show her something that will interest her more than the cricket.”

“Oh, Lady Dromard, I can't think of taking you away from the match,” cried Christina, while Ruth's eyes danced, and the bonnets in front turned round.

“My dear Miss Luttrell, it will interest *me* more, now that Lord Manister is out.”

“But there's Mr. Dromard.”

“Oh, that boy! He has made more runs this week than are good for him. Miss Luttrell, am I to go alone?”

The bonnets in front knocked together.

CHAPTER XII.

ORDEAL BY BATTLE.

IF Tiny Luttrell suffered at all from self-consciousness as she followed Lady Dromard from the tent, she hid it uncommonly well. Her colour did not change, while her expression was neither bashful nor bold, and unnatural only in its entire naturalness. Considering that the conversation in the ladies' tent underwent a momentary lull, by no means so slight as to escape a sensitive ear, the girl's serene bearing at the Countess's skirts was in its way an achievement, of which no one thought more highly than Lady Dromard herself. Christina had not merely imagined that she was being systematically watched. No sooner were they in the open air than the Countess wheeled abruptly, expecting

to surprise some slight embarrassment, not unpardonable in so young a face ; and this was not the only occasion on which she was agreeably disappointed in little Miss Luttrell. The short cut to the house was a narrow path that crossed an intervening paddock. They followed this path. But now Lady Dromard walked behind, with eyes slightly narrowed ; and still she approved.

Presently they reached the conservatory. It was large and lofty, and the smooth white flags and spreading fronds gave it an appearance of coolness and quiet very different from Christina's recollection of the place on the night of the dance, when Chinese lanterns had shone and smoked and smelt among the foliage, and a frivolous hum had filled the air. The gum-tree proved to be a sapling of no great promise or pretensions. Nor was it seen to advantage, being planted in the central bed, in the midst of some admirable palms and tree-ferns. But

Tiny made a long arm to seize the leaves and pull them to her nostrils, setting foot on the soft soil in her excitement ; and when she started back with an apology for the mark, her face was beaming.

“But that was a real whiff of Australia,” she added, gratefully—“the first I’ve had since I sailed. It was very, very good of you to bring me, Lady Dromard. If you knew how it reminds me ! ”

“I thought it would interest you,” remarked Lady Dromard, who was herself more interested in the footprint on the soil, which was absurdly small. “If you like, I will show you something that should remind you still more.”

“Oh, of course I like to see anything Australian ; but I am sure I am troubling you a great deal, Lady Dromard ! ”

“Not in the least, my dear Miss Luttrell. I have something extremely Australian to show you now.”

Countess Dromard led the way through the room in which Tiny had danced. It was still carpetless and empty, and the clatter of her walking-shoes on the floor which her ball-slippers had skimmed so noiselessly struck a note that jarred. The desire came over Tiny to turn back. As they passed through the hall, a side door stood open: the girl saw it with a gasp for the open air. It was an odd sensation, as of the march into prison. It made her lag while it lasted; when it passed it was as though weights had been removed from her feet. She ran lightly up the shallow stairs; Lady Dromard was waiting on the landing, and led her along a corridor.

Here Tiny forgot that her feet had drummed vague misgivings into her mind; she could no longer hear her own steps, the corridor was so thickly carpeted. It was a special corridor, leading to a very special room of delicate tints and dainty furniture, and Christina was so far herself

again as to enter without a qualm. But her qualms had been a rather singular thing.

“This is my own little chapel-of-ease, Miss Luttrell,” the Countess explained; “and now do you not see a fellow-countryman?”

She pointed to the window; and in front of the window was a pedestal supporting a gilded cage, and in the cage a pink-and-gray parrot, of a kind with which the girl had been familiar from her infancy. “O you beauty!” cried Christina, going to the cage and scratching the bird’s head through the wires. “It’s a galar,” she added.

“Indeed,” said Lady Dromard, watching her; “a galar! I must remember that. By the way, can you tell me why he doesn’t talk?”

Christina answered in a slightly preoccupied manner that galars very seldom did. She had become quite absorbed in the bird; she seemed easily pleased. She went the length of asking whether she might take him out, and

received a hesitating permission to do so at her own risk, Lady Dromard confessing that for her own part she was quite afraid to touch him through the wires. In a twinkling the girl had the bird in her hand, and was smoothing its feathers with her chin. The sun was beginning to struggle through the clouds; the window faced the west; and the faint rays falling on the young girl's face and the bird's bright plumage threw a good light on a charming picture. Lady Dromard was reminded of the artificial art of her young days, when this was a favourite posture, and searched narrowly for artifice in her guest. Finding none, she admired more keenly than before, but became also more timid on the other's account, so that she could fancy the blood sliding down the fair skin which the beak actually touched.

“Dear Miss Luttrell, do put him back! I tremble for you.”

Tiny put the quiet thing back on the perch.

Then she turned to Lady Dromard with rather a comic expression.

“Do you know what we used to do with this gentleman up on the station?” said Tiny, shamefacedly. “We poisoned him wholesale, to save our crop! But this one seems like an old friend to me. Lady Dromard, you have taken me back to the bush this afternoon!”

“So it appears,” observed the Countess dryly, “or I think you would admire my little view. That’s Gallow Hill, and I’m rather proud of my view of it, because it is the only hill of any sort in these parts. Then the sun sets behind it, and those three trees stand out so.”

“Ah! I have often wanted to climb up to those three trees,” said Tiny, who took a tantalised interest in Gallow Hill; “but I mayn’t, because I’m in England, where trespassers will be prosecuted.”

For a moment Lady Dromard stared. Then she saw that Christina had merely forgotten.

“Dear me, that stupid notice-board!” exclaimed the Countess. “Lord Dromard never meant it to apply to everybody. Next time you come here, come over Gallow Hill, and through the little green gate you can just see. You will find it a quarter of the distance.”

Christina had indeed spoken without thinking of Gallow Hill as a part of the estate, or of the warning to trespassers as Lord Dromard’s doing. Now she apologised, and was naturally a little confused; but this time the Countess would not have had her otherwise. “You shall go back that way this very evening,” she said kindly, “and I promise you shan’t be prosecuted.” But Christina had to pet her fellow-countryman for a minute or two before she quite regained her ease, while her ladyship touched the bell and ordered tea.

“How fond you must be of the bush!” Lady Dromard exclaimed, as the girl still lingered by the cage.

"I like it very much," said Christina soberly.

"Better than Melbourne?"

"Oh, infinitely."

"And England?"

"Yes, better than England—I can't help it," Tiny added apologetically.

"There's no reason why you should," said Lady Dromard, with a smile. "I could imagine your quite disliking England after Australia. I'm sure my son disliked it when he first came back."

"Did he?" the girl said, indifferently. "Ah well, I don't dislike England. I admire it very much, and of course it is ever so much better than Australia, in every way. We have no villages like Essingham out there, no red tiles and old churches, and certainly no villagers who treat you like a queen on wheels when you walk down the street. We've nothing of that sort—nor of this sort, either—no splendid old

houses and beautiful old grounds ! But I can't help it, I'd rather live out there. Give me the bush ! ”

“ You *are* enthusiastic about the bush,” said Lady Dromard, laughing ; “ yet you don't know how fresh enthusiasm is to one nowadays.”

“ I'm afraid I'm not enthusiastic about anything else, then,” answered Christina with engaging candour. “ They tell me I don't half appreciate England ; I disappoint all my friends here.”

“ Ah, that is perhaps your little joke at our expense ! ”

Christina was on the brink of an audacious reply, when a footman entered with the tea-tray. That took some of the audacity out of her. She had not heard the order given. Once more she reflected where she was, and with whom, and once more she wished herself elsewhere. It was a mild return of her panic down-stairs. Now she felt vaguely apprehensive and as vaguely

exultant. In the uncertain fusion of her feelings, she was apt to become a little unguarded in what she said; there was safety in her sense of this tendency, however.

Lady Dromard was reflecting also. As the footman withdrew, she had told him not to shut the door. The truth was, she had got Christina to herself by pure design, though she had not originally intended to get her to herself up here. That had been an inspiration of the moment, and even now Lady Dromard was by no means sure of its wisdom. She had gone so far as to closet herself with this girl, but she did not wish the proceeding to appear so pronounced either to the footman or to the girl herself. It would make the footman talk, while it might frighten the girl. That at any rate was the idea of Countess Dromard, who, however, had not yet learnt her way about the young mind with which she was dealing.

The tea-tray had been placed on a small table near the window. Lady Dromard promptly settled herself with her back to the light, and motioned Christina to a chair facing her.

“Now you’ll be able to watch your beloved bird,” said her ladyship craftily. “I thought we might as well have tea now we are here. I thought it would be so much more comfortable than having it in the tent.”

Tiny settled a business matter by stating that she took two pieces of sugar, but only one spot of cream. Unconsciously, however, she had followed Lady Dromard’s advice, for her eyes were fixed on the parrot in the cage.

“I have only had him a few months,” observed the Countess suggestively. “Something less than a year, I should say.”

“Yes?” And Tiny lowered her eyes politely to her hostess’s face.

“Yes,” repeated Lady Dromard affirmatively. “My son brought him home for me. It was

the only present he had time to get, so I rather value it."

The girl's gaze returned involuntarily to the bird she had caressed; apparently her interest was neither diminished nor increased by this information as to its origin.

"He was in a great hurry to run away from us, was he not?" she remarked, inoffensively; but there was no attempt in her manner to conceal the fact that Christina knew what she was talking about.

"He was obliged to return rather suddenly," said the Countess, after a moment's hesitation. She made a longer pause before slyly adding, "I consider myself very lucky to have got him back at all."

"How is that, Lady Dromard?"

And Christina out-stared the Countess, so that she was asked whether she would not take another cup of tea. She would, and her hand neither rattled it empty nor spilt it full. Then

Lady Dromard smiled at the coronet on her teaspoon, and said to it:

“The fact is, I was terrified lest he should go and marry one of you.”

“One of *us*?”

“Some fascinating Australian beauty,” said Lady Dromard hastily. “So many aides-de-camp have done that.”

“Poor—young—men!” said Tiny, as slowly and solemnly as though her words were going to the young men’s funeral. “It would have been a calamity indeed.”

So far from showing indignation, Lady Dromard leant forward in her chair, to say in her most winning manner:

“I should have been all the more terrified had I known *you*, Miss Luttrell!”

Clearly this was meant for one of those blunt effective compliments to which Lady Dromard had the peculiar knack of imparting delicacy and grace. But the words were no

sooner uttered than she saw their double meaning, and grimly awaited the obvious misconception. Tiny, however, had a quick perception, and plenty of common sense in little things. Instead of a snub, the Countess received a good-tempered smile, for which she could not help feeling grateful at the time; but now her instinct told her that she was dealing with a person with whom it might be well to be a little more downright, and she obeyed her instinct without further delay.

“Miss Luttrell, I am sure there is no occasion for me to beat about the bush—with you,” she began, in an altered but a no less flattering tone; “I see that one is quite safe in being frank with you. The fact is—and you know it—my son very nearly did marry someone out there. Now, you met him out there in society, and you probably knew everyone there who was worth knowing, so pray don’t pretend that you know nothing about this.”

Their eyes were joined, but at the moment Christina's was the cooler glance.

"I couldn't pretend that, Lady Dromard, for it happens that I know *all* about it."

The Countess was perceptibly startled. "The girl was a friend of yours?" she inquired quickly.

"A great friend," answered Tiny, nodding.

"How I wish you would tell me her name!"

"I mustn't do that." This was said decidedly. "But it seems a strange thing that you don't know it."

"It is a strange thing," Lady Dromard allowed; "nevertheless it's the truth. I never heard her name. You may imagine my curiosity. Miss Luttrell, I seem to have felt ever since I met you that you knew something about this—that you could tell one something. And I don't mind confessing to you now—since I see you are not the one to misunderstand me wilfully—that I have purposely

sought an opportunity of sounding you on the subject."

Christina smiled, for this was not news to her.

"My son will tell me nothing," continued Lady Dromard, "and I have, of course, the greatest curiosity to know everything. It is no idle curiosity, Miss Luttrell. I am his mother, and he has never got over that attachment."

"Has he not?" said Tiny, with dry satire.

"He has never got over it," repeated Lady Dromard, in a tone which was a match for the other. "Has the girl?"

Tiny was startled in her turn. She hesitated before replying, and seemed to waver over the nature of her reply. It was the first sign she had shown of wavering at all, and Lady Dromard drew a breath. The girl was hanging her head, and murmuring that she really could not answer for the other girl. Suddenly she

flung up her face, and it was hot, but not hotter than her words :

“ Yes, Lady Dromard, you are his mother. But the girl was my friend. He treated her abominably ! ”

“ It wasn’t his fault—it was mine,” said Lady Dromard, steadily.

“ I’m afraid that does not make one think any better of him,” murmured the young girl. Her chin was resting in her hand. The flush had passed from her face as suddenly as it had come. Her eyes were raised to the sky out of window, and there was in them the sad, hardened, reckless look that those who knew her best had seen too often, latterly, in her silent moments. The sun was dropping clear of the clouds, and the brighter rays fell kindly over Tiny’s dark hair and pale piquant face. The keen eye that was on her had never watched more closely nor admired so much.

“ Consider ! ” said Lady Dromard presently,

and rather gently. "Try to put yourself in our place—and consider. We have a position, here in England, of which very few people can be got to take a sensible view; half the country professes an absurd contempt for it, while the other half speaks of it and of us with bated breath. We ourselves naturally think something of our position, and we try, as we say, to keep it up. Of course we are worldly in the popular sense. We bring up our children with worldly ideas. They must make worldly marriages in their own station. Is it so very contemptible that we should see to this, and dread beyond most things an unwise or an unequal marriage? Now do consider: we let our son go out to Australia, because it is good for a young man to see the world before he marries and settles down—and mind! that is what he was about to do. If he had not gone to Australia then, he would have been married at once. He was all but engaged. It was a

case of putting off the engagement instead of the marriage. We do not believe in long formal engagements; we do not permit them. We find them undesirable for many reasons. So, you see, he goes out to Australia as good as engaged but unable to say so, and very young, and no doubt very susceptible. Can you wonder that I tremble for him when he has gone? Well, he is the best son in the world, and has told me everything always. That is my comfort. But presently he tells one things in his letters which make one tremble more than ever, though he tells them jokingly. Then a cousin of Lord Dromard's stays a day or two in Melbourne and comes home with a report——”

Christina's face twitched in the sunlight. “I suppose that was Captain Dromard?” she said quietly; “I never met him, but I saw him.” She seemed to see him then, and that was why her face twitched. She was still

staring out of the window at the yellowing sky.

“Captain Dromard had forgotten the girl’s name,” said the Countess, pointedly; “but he told me enough to make me write to my boy—I nearly cabled! And do you think I was wrong?”

“Not from your point of view, Lady Dromard,” answered Christina judicially, with her eyes half-closed in the slanting sunbeams which she chose to face. “Certainly you cannot have had very much faith in Lord Manister’s judgment; but the case is altered if he was to all intents and purposes engaged to a girl in England; and, at all events, that’s the worst that could be said of you—looking at it from your own point of view. But is not the girl out there entitled to a point of view as well?” And the hardened reckless eyes were turned so suddenly upon Lady Dromard that the youth and grace and bitterness of the girl smote her straight to the heart.

There was a slight tremor and great tenderness in the voice that whispered, "Did she feel it very much? Come, come . . . don't tell me it broke her heart!"

"No, I won't tell you that," said the girl briskly, but with a laugh which hurt. "That doesn't break so easily in these days. No, it didn't break her heart, Lady Dromard—it did much worse. It got her talked about. It poisoned her mind, it killed her faith, it spoilt her temper. It did all that—and one thing worse still. Though it didn't *break* her heart, Lady Dromard, it cracked it, so that it will never ring true any more; it made her hate those she had loved—those who loved her; it made it impossible for her ever to care for anybody in the whole wide world again!"

Lady Dromard had drawn her chair nearer to the girl, and nearer still. Lady Dromard was no longer mistress of herself.

"Did it make her hate *you*, my dear?"

“It made her loathe—me.”

Lady Dromard was seen to battle with a strong womanly impulse, and to lose. Her fine eyes filled with tears. Her soft white hands flew out to Christina's, and drew them to her bosom. At this moment a young man in flannels appeared at the door, and the young man was Lord Manister; but the rich carpet had muffled his tread, and the two women had eyes for one another only—the girl he had loved—the mother who had drawn him from her. The same sunbeam washed them both.

“Now I know her name—now I know it!”

“I think you cannot have found it out this minute, Lady Dromard.”

“But I have. I have never known whether to believe it or not, since it first crossed my mind, the night you dined here. You see, I know him so well! But he didn't tell me, and after all I had no reason to suppose it. Oh, he has told me nothing—and you are the gulf

between us, for which I have only myself to thank. Ah, if I had only dreamt—of you ! ”

Tiny suffered herself to be kissed upon the cheek.

“ Pray, say no more, dear Lady Dromard,” she said quietly. “ Shall I tell you why ? ” she added, drawing back. “ Why, because it’s quite a thing of the past.”

“ It is not a thing of the past,” cried Lady Dromard, passionately. “ He has never loved anyone else. He bitterly regrets having listened to me, and I, now that I know you—I bitterly regret everything ! And he loves you . . . and I would rather . . . and I have told him what is the simple truth — how I have admired you from the first ! ”

The last sentence was doubtless a mistake. It was the only one that would let itself be uttered, however, and before another could be added by either woman Lord Manister had tramped into the room. They fell the further apart as

he came between them and stooped down, laying his hands heavily on the little table. His eyes sped from the girl to his mother, and back to the girl, on whom they stayed. One hand held his crumpled cap. His hair was disordered. In many ways he looked at his best, as Tiny had always said he did in flannels. But never before had Tiny seen him half so earnest, and sad, and handsome.

“My mother is right,” he said firmly. “I love you, and I ask you to forgive us both, and to give me what I don’t deserve—one word of hope!”

The young girl glanced from his grave humble face to that of his mother, through whose tears a smile was breaking. Lady Dromard’s lips were parted, half in surprise at the humility of her son’s words, half in eagerness for the answer to them. Tiny Luttrell read her like a printed book, and rose to her feet with a smile that was equally unmistakable, for it was a smile of triumph.

CHAPTER XIII.

HER HOUR OF TRIUMPH.

Now Herbert was taking part in the match, and Ruth was in the ladies' tent, trying not to think of Christina, who was playing a single-wicket game in another place. But Erskine Holland was rolling the rectory court, gloomily and quite alone, and he was tired of Essingham. Not only had the day kept fine in spite of its threats, but towards the end of the afternoon it turned out very fine indeed, and the light became excellent for lawn-tennis, because there was nobody to play with poor Erskine. Even the good Willoughby was on the accursed field over yonder; and he mattered least. Ruth was there. Tiny was there. Herbert was not only there, but playing for Lord Manister, who was

notoriously short of men. One can hardly wonder at Erskine's condemnation of his brother-in-law out of his own mouth as a stultified young fraud in the matter of Lord Manister. As to the girls, some old tenets of his concerning women in general returned to taunt him for the shipwreck of his holiday at least. Yet Ruth had but plotted for her sister's advancement, not for her own. Whether Christina cared in the least for the man whom she evidently meant to marry, if she could, was, after all, Christina's own affair. Erskine had only heard her disparage him behind his back—at which Herbert himself could not beat her—whereas Ruth had at least been openly in favour of the fellow from the very first. But if Herbert was a fraud, what was the name for Tiny? Clearly, the only trustworthy person of the three was Ruth, who at least—yet alone—was consistent.

To this conclusion, which was not without

its pleasing side, Erskine came with his eyes on the ground he was rolling. But as he pushed the roller towards the low stone wall dividing the lawn from the churchyard, into which the balls were too often hit, one came whizzing out of it for a change, and struck the roller under Erskine's nose. And leaning with her elbows on the low wall, and her right hand under her chin, as though it were the last right hand that could have flung that ball, stood the girl for whom a bad enough name had yet to be found.

"Where on earth did you spring from?" Holland asked, a little brusquely, as he stopped for a moment and then rolled on towards the wall.

"If you mean the ball," replied Tiny, "it must be the one we lost the last time we played. I have just found it among the graves, and it slipped out of my hand."

"I meant you," said Erskine, with an

unsuccessful smile ; and he pushed the roller close up to the wall, and folded his arms upon the handle.

“ Oh, I have come from the hall, by the forbidden path over Gallow Hill ; but it seems that wasn't meant for us, and at any rate I have leave to use it whenever I like.” She was puzzling him, and she knew it, but she met his eyes with a mysterious smile for some moments before adding : “ You can't think what a view there is from the top of the hill—I mean, a view of the hall. Just now the sun was blazing in all the windows, like the flash of a broadside from an old two-decker ; you see, it made such an impression on me that I thought of that for your benefit.”

Erskine acknowledged the benefit rather heavily with a nod.

“ What have you done with Ruth ? ”

“ To the best of my belief, she is watching the match ; at least, she was an hour ago.”

"Something has happened!" exclaimed Erskine Holland, starting upright and leaving the roller-handle swinging in the air like an inverted pendulum. His eyes were unconsciously stern; those of the girl seemed to quail before them.

"Something *has* happened," she admitted to the top of the wall. "I suppose you would get to know sooner or later, so I may as well tell you myself now. The fact is, Lord Manister has just proposed to me."

Erskine dropped his eyes and shrugged slightly; then he raised them to the setting sun, and tried to look resigned; then, with a noticeable effort, he brought them back to her face, and forced a smile.

"I'm not surprised. I saw it coming, though I hardly expected it so soon. Well, Tiny, I congratulate you! He is about the most brilliant match in England."

"Quite the most, I thought."

“And I am sure he is a first-rate fellow,” added Erskine with vigour, regretting that he had not said this first, and disliking what he had said.

“Oh, he is a very good sort,” acknowledged Tiny to the wall.

“So you ought to be the happiest young woman in the world, as you are perhaps the luckiest—I mean in one sense. And I congratulate you, Tiny, I do indeed!”

To clinch his congratulations he held out his hand, from which she raised her eyes to him at last—with the look of a cabman refusing his proper fare.

“And I took you for the most discerning person I knew!” said Tiny, very slowly.

“You don’t mean to say——”

His eagerness and incredulity arrested his speech.

“I *do* mean to say.”

“That you have—refused him?”

Tiny nodded. "With thanks—not too many."

They stared at one another for some moments longer. Then Erskine sat down on the roller, and folded his arms and looked extremely serious, though already the corners of his mouth were beginning to twitch.

"Now, you know, Tiny, I'm *in loco parentis* as long as you're in England. In this one matter you've no business to chaff me. Honestly now, is it the truth that Lord Manister has asked you to marry him, and that you have said him nay?"

"It is the truest truth I ever uttered in my life. I refused him point-blank," added Tiny, with eyes once more lowered, as though the memory were not unmingled with shame, "and before his own mother!"

"In the presence of Lady Dromard?"

She nodded solemnly, but with a blush.

"Good Lord!" murmured Erskine. "And

I was ass enough to think you were leading him on ! ”

She whispered, “ And so I was.”

For one moment Erskine stared at her more seriously than ever; then the reaction came, and she saw him shaking. He shook until the tears were in his eyes; and when he was rid of them, he perceived the same thing in Tiny's eyes, but obviously not from the same cause.

“ *I* don't think it's such a joke,” said the girl, in the voice of one pained when in pain already. “ I am pretty well ashamed of myself, I can tell you. If you really consider yourself responsible for me, I think you might let me tell you something about it; for you must tell Ruth—I daren't. But if you're going to laugh . . . let me tell you it's no laughing matter to me, now I've done it.”

“ Forgive me,” said Holland, instantly; “ I

am a brute. Do tell me anything you care to ; I promise not to laugh unless you do. And I might be able to help you."

"Ah, you would if anybody could ; but nobody can ; I have behaved just scandalously, and I know it as well as you do, now that it's too late. Yet I wish that you knew all about it, Erskine!" She looked at him wistfully. "You understand things so. Would it bore you if I were to tell you how the whole thing happened?"

The gilt hands of the church clock made it ten minutes to six when Erskine shook his head and bent it attentively. When the hour struck he had opened his mouth only once, to answer her question as to how much he knew of her affair with Lord Manister in Melbourne. He had known for a day and a half as much as Ruth knew ; and he did not learn much more now, for the girl could speak more freely of recent incidents, and dwelt principally on those of

that afternoon, beginning with Lady Dromard's extraordinary attentiveness on the cricket-field.

"I felt there was something behind that, though I didn't know what; I could only be sure that she had her eye on me. However, I took a tremendous vow to face whatever came without moving a muscle. I think I succeeded on the whole, but I was on the edge of a panic when she took me up-stairs. I wanted to clear! I had qualms!"

She was startlingly candid on another point:

"I also made up my mind to behave as prettily as possible, just to show her. I was really pleased with the interest she seemed to take in what I told her about the bush, and I was quite delighted to see a galar again. But I needn't have made the fuss I did in taking it out of its cage; that was purely put on, and all the time I was mortally afraid that it would peck me. Yet I suppose," added Tiny, after some moments, "you won't believe me when

I tell you that I am ashamed of all that already?"

Erskine declared that there was nothing in the world to be ashamed of; on the contrary; in his opinion she was perfectly justified in all she had done. With kind eyes upon her, he added what he very nearly meant, that he was proud of her; and his remark wrought a change in her expression which convinced him finally that at least she was not proud of herself.

"Ah, you weren't there, Erskine," said Christina sadly, her blue eyes clouded with penitence; "you don't know how kind poor Lady Dromard was, with all her dodges! She said it would be more comfortable to have tea up there. Comfortable was the last thing I felt, in my heart, but I never let her see that; and besides, I didn't as yet guess what was coming. Even when she wanted me to tell her my own name, I couldn't be sure that she suspected me. I wasn't sure until she asked me whether the girl had got over it,

when I knew from her voice. And I saw then that she really rather liked me, and half wished it to be; and I was sorry, because I liked her; and though I spoke my mind to her about her son, I should have made a clean breast of everything to her if he hadn't come in just then. I should have told her straight that I didn't care *that* for him—not now—and that I had been flirting with him disgracefully just to try to make him smart as I had smarted. That's the whole truth of it, Erskine; and I meant to tell her so in another second, because I couldn't stand her kissing me and crying and all that. I should have been crying myself next moment. But just then *he* came in, and I remembered everything. I remembered, too, what she had had to do with it, on her own showing; and when I saw what she wanted me to say, I think I became possessed."

Her brother-in-law was very curious to know all that Christina had said, but she would not

tell him. She merely remarked that he would think all the worse of her if he knew, even though at the moment she could hardly remember any one thing that she had said. Then she paused, and recalled a little, and the little made her blush.

“ I didn’t come well out of it,” she declared.

Erskine threw discredit on her word in this particular matter; he sniffed an extravagant remorse.

“ Talk of hitting a man when he’s down ! ” exclaimed Tiny miserably. “ I hit Lady Dromard when the tears were in her eyes, and Lord Manister when he was hitting himself. He took it splendidly. He is a gentleman. I don’t care what else he is—lord or no lord, he would always be a perfect gentleman. What’s more, I am very sorry for him.”

“ Why on earth be sorry for him ? ” asked Erskine, with a touch of irritation; for when Tiny spoke of Lady Dromard’s tears, her own

eyes swam with them ; and to do a thing like this and start crying over it the moment it was done seemed to Erskine a bad sign. The event was so very fresh, and so entirely contrary to his own most recent apprehensions, that at present his only feeling in the matter was one of profound satisfaction. But the symptoms she showed of relenting already interfered not a little with that satisfaction ; while, even more than by the remark that had prompted his question, he was alarmed by her answer to it :

“Because I believe he does care for me, a little bit, in his own way—or he thinks he does, which comes to the same thing ; and because, when all’s said and done, I have treated him like a little fiend !”

“My good girl,” said Holland, uneasily, “I should remember how he treated you.”

“Ah no,” answered Christina, shaking her head ; “I have remembered that far too long as it is. That’s ancient history.”

“Well, be sorry for him if you like; be sorry for yourself as well.”

That was the best advice that occurred to him at the moment, but it set her off at a tangent.

“I should think I am sorry for myself—I should be sorry for any girl who could so far forget herself!” cried Christina, speaking bitterly and at a great pace. “Shall I tell you the sort of thing I said? When I told him I could not possibly believe in his really caring for me, after the way in which he left Melbourne without so much as saying good-bye to me or sending me word that he was going, he said it wasn’t then he really loved me, but now. So I told him I was sorry to hear it, as in my case it might perhaps have been then, but it certainly wasn’t now. I actually said that! Then Lady Dromard spoke up. She had been staring at me without a word, but she spoke up now, and it served me right. I can’t blame her

for being indignant, but she didn't say half she could have said, and it was more what she implied that sticks and stings. It didn't sting then, though; I was thinking of all the talk out there. It was when Lord Manister stopped her, and held out his hand to me and said—'Anyway you forgive me now? I thought you *had* forgiven me'—it was then I began to tingle. I said I forgave him, of course; and then I bolted. But I was sorry for him, and I *am* sorry for him, whatever you say, for I had cut him to the heart. . . . And he looked most awfully nice the whole time!"

With these frivolous last words there came a smile: the normal girl shone out for an instant, as the sun breaks through clouds: and Erskine took advantage of the gleam.

"To the heart of his vanity—that's where you cut. You've humiliated him, certainly; but surely he deserved it? In any case, you've given young Manister the right-about; and

upon my soul that's rather a performance for our Tiny! I should only like to have seen it."

"It's good of you to call me your Tiny," returned the young girl, rather coldly. "But don't talk to me about performances, please, unless you mean disgraceful performances. I wish I had never come to England—I wish I was back in Australia—I wish I was up at the station!" she cried with sudden passion. "I am miserable, and you won't understand me; and Ruth couldn't if she tried."

"My dear girl," Erskine said, in rather an injured tone, "surely you're a little unfair on us both? Ruth will understand, when I tell her; and as for me—I think I understand you already."

"Not you!" answered Tiny, disdainfully. "You call it a performance! You treat it as a joke!" And she left him with the tears in her eyes.

He watched her enter the garden by the

little gate lower down, and saunter towards the house with lagging steps. The low sun streamed upon her drooping figure. Even at that distance, and with her face hidden from him, she seemed to Erskine the incarnation of all that was wayward and wilful and sweet in girlhood. And her tears and temper made her doubly sweet, as the rain draws new fragrance from a flower; but they had also made her doubly difficult to understand. One moment he had seen her plainly, as in the limelight; in another, she had retired to a deeper shade than before. The explanation of her conduct towards Lord Manister had been a sufficiently startling revelation, yet a perfectly lucid one; but what of this prompt transition to tears and penitence? The only interpretation which suggested itself to Erskine was one that he refused to entertain. He preferred to attribute Christina's present state of mind to mere reaction; if the reaction had taken a rather hysterical form, that perhaps was not

to be wondered at. Moreover, this seemed to be indeed the case: for the girl was seen no more that day, save by Ruth: who by night was perhaps the most disappointed person in the parish; only she managed to conceal her disappointment in a way that it was impossible not to admire.

Nevertheless, dinner at the rectory was a dismal meal, and the more so for the high spirits of Herbert, which, meeting with no response, turned to silence. Poor Herbert happened to have distinguished himself in the match, which, indeed, he had been largely instrumental in winning for his side; but neither Ruth nor her husband showed any interest in his exploit, and Tiny was not there. Erskine was no cricketer; Herbert hated him for it, and made a sullen attack on the claret. But at length it dawned upon him that there was some special reason for the silence and glum looks at either end of the table, for which Christina's alleged headache would not in itself sufficiently account; and when

Ruth left the table early to look after Tiny, he said bluntly to Erskine—

“ You’re enough to give a fellow the blues, the pair of you ! What’s wrong ? Have I done anything, or has Tiny ? ”

Erskine temporised, pushing forward the claret. “ I understand *you* have done something,” he said, with a first approach to geniality ; “ but upon my word, old fellow, I don’t know what it is. I couldn’t listen, for the life of me ; and you must forgive me. Tiny’s upset, and that’s upset Ruth, which I suppose has upset me in my turn. Please call me names—I deserve them—and then tell me again what you have done.”

Herbert did not require two invitations to do this. He had not only acquitted himself brilliantly, but there was a peculiar piquancy in his success : he had saved the side which had treated him with unobtrusive but galling contempt until the last moment, when he opened their eyes, and

their throats too. They had put him to field at short leg ; during the intervals, after the fall of a wicket, not one of them had spoken a word to him, save good-natured Mr. Willoughby ; and they had sent him in last, with hopeless faces, when there were many runs to get. The good batsmen, beginning with Lord Manister, had mostly failed miserably. The Hon. Stanley Dromard, who had been in fine form all the week, had alone done well ; and he was still at the wicket when Herbert whipped in, with his ears full of gratuitous instructions to keep his wicket up, and not to try to hit the professional, and his heart of other designs. Those instructions were given without much knowledge of this young Australian, who took a sincere delight in disregarding them. He had hit out from the very first, particularly at the professional, who disliked being hit, and who was also somewhat demoralised by the extreme respect with which he had been treated by preceding batsmen. There

were thirty runs to make when Herbert went in, and in a quarter of an hour he made them nearly all from his own bat, exhibiting an almost insolent amount of coolness and nerve at the crisis. The best of it was, that no one had considered it a crisis when he went in; but his truculent batting had immediately made it one, and ultimately, in a scene of the greatest excitement, of which Herbert was the hero, an almost certain defeat had been converted into a glorious victory. All this was confirmed by the local newspaper next day; considering his achievement and his character, the hero himself told his tale with modesty.

“He bowled like beggary,” he concluded, in allusion to the discomfited professional; “but I tell you, old toucher, we were too many measles for him!”

“They were more civil to you after that?”

“My oath!” said Herbert complacently. “Those Eton jokers kicked up hell’s delight!

Stanley Dromard shook hands with me between the wickets, and said I ought to be going up to Trinity; but he's a real good sportsman, with less side than you'd think. His governor the Earl congratulated me in person—you bet I felt it down my marrow! He wants to know how it is I'm not playing for the Australians. The only man who didn't say a word to me was that dam' fool Manister."

"Ah, he was on the ground, then?"

"He turned up as I went in; and when I came out he didn't look at me. Who the blazes does he think he is? I'm as good a man as him, though I'm a larrikin and he's a twopenny lord. I don't care what he is, I had the bulge over him to-day—he made four!"

"Perhaps someone else has had the bulge over him, too," suggested Erskine, gently.

"Has someone?"

Erskine nodded.

"Our Tiny?"

“Yes; he has asked her to marry him, and she has refused him on the spot.”

Herbert shot out of his chair.

“So’re you crackin’! I thought something was *wrong*, man! O Lord, this is a treat!”

“It’s a treat she didn’t prepare one for; I had visions of a very different upshot.”

“Aha! you never know where you have our Tiny. No more does old Manister. Oh, but this is a treat for the gods!”

“I told Tiny it was a performance,” Erskine said, reflectively; “it struck me as one, and I was trying to cheer her up—but that wasn’t the way.”

“No? She’s a terror, our Tiny!” murmured Herbert, with a running chuckle. “Now I know why the brute was so civil to me the first time I met him in these parts. Even then my hand itched to fill his eye for him, but I didn’t say anything, because Tiny seemed on the job herself. To think this was her game! I must

go and shake hands with her; I must go and tell her she's done better than filling up his eye."

"Don't you," said Erskine quietly. "I wouldn't say much to her afterwards, either, if I may give you a hint. She doesn't take quite our view of this matter. Not that we can pretend that ours is at all a nice view of it, mind you; only I really do regard it as a bit of a performance on our Tiny's part, and I should like to have seen it."

"By ghost, so should I! And seriously," added Herbert, "he deserved all he's got. I happen to know."

CHAPTER XIV.

A CYCLE OF MOODS.

BUT the girl herself chose to think otherwise. That was her perversity. She could now see excuses for her own ill-treatment in the past, but none for the revenge she had just taken on the man who had treated her badly. A revenge it had certainly been, plotted systematically, and carried out from first to last in sufficiently cold blood. But already she was ashamed of it. So sincerely ashamed was Christina, now that she had completed her retaliation and secured her triumph, that she very much exaggerated the evil she had done, and could imagine no baser behaviour than her own. She had, indeed, felt the baseness of it while yet there was time to draw back, but the memory of her own humiliation

had been her goad whenever she hesitated; and then the way had been made irresistibly easy for her. But this was no comfort to her now. Neither was that goad any excuse, to her self-accusing mind; for she could feel it no longer, which made her wonder how she had ever felt it at all. Her judgment was obscured by the magnitude of her meanness in her own eyes. The revulsion of feeling was as complete as it was startling and distressing to herself.

In her trouble and excitement that night it became necessary for her to speak to someone, and she spoke with unusual freedom to Ruth, who displayed on this occasion, among others, a really lamentable want of tact. Tiny sought to explain her trouble: it was not that she could possibly care for Lord Manister again, or dream of marrying him under any circumstances (Ruth said nothing to all this), but that she half believed he really cared for her (Ruth was sure of it), in his own way (Ruth seemed to

believe in his way); and in any case she was very sorry for him. So was Ruth. In all the circumstances, the sorrow of Ruth might well have received a less frank expression than she thought fit to give it.

But it is only fair to say that this did not occur to Ruth. She was in and out of the room until at last Christina was asleep, and dreaming of the hall windows ablaze against the sunset, while again and again in her sleep the warm broken voice of Lady Dromard turned hard and cold. Ruth watched her affectionately enough as she slept, and consoled herself for her own disappointment by the reflection that at least they understood one another now. Therefore it was a rude shock to her when Christina came down next day and would hardly look at any of them.

Her mood had changed; it was now her worst. She was pale still, but her expression was set, and there was a quarrelsome glitter in

her eyes; the fact being, that she was a little tired of chastising herself, and exceedingly ready to begin on some second person. So Erskine himself was badly snubbed at his own breakfast-table, and when Tiny afterwards took herself into the kitchen-garden Ruth followed her for an explanation, in the fulness of her confidence that they understood one another at last. No explanation was given, Tiny merely remarking that she was sorry if she had been rude, but that she was in an evil state all through, and unfit for human society. To Ruth, however, this only meant that Tiny was unfit to be alone. So Ruth remained in the kitchen-garden too, and was good enough to resume gratuitously her consolations of the night before. But in a very few minutes she returned complaining to her husband.

“My dear,” said he at once, “you oughtn’t to have gone near her. Above all, you shouldn’t have broached the subject of her

affairs; you should have left that to her. She seems considerably ashamed of herself; and though I must say I think that's absurd, you can't help liking her the better for it. She surprised us all, but she surprised herself too, because she has found that she can't strike a blow without hurting herself at least as badly as anybody else; and that shows the good in her. Personally, I think the blow was justified; but that has nothing to do with it. The point is, that if she's mortified about the whole concern, as is obviously the case, it must increase her mortification to know that we know all about it, and that she herself has told us. Which applies more to me than to you. It was natural she should tell you; she only told me because I happened to be the first person she saw, and I can quite understand her hating me by this time for listening. We must ignore the whole matter, except when it pleases her to bring it up; and then we must let her make the running."

“I hate people to require so much humouring!” exclaimed Ruth, with some reason.

“Well, I must say I’m glad that *you* don’t,” her husband said, prettily. “As to Tiny, her faults are very sweet, and her moods are really interesting—but I’m thankful they don’t run in the family!”

He seemed thankful.

“Yet you’re a wonderful man for understanding other people,” returned Ruth, as prettily; and her eyes were full of admiration.

“Ah well, Tiny’s not like other people. I think she must enjoy startling one. Our best plan is to expect the unexpected of her from this time forth; and to let her be until she comes to herself.”

And that came to pass quite in good time. Having effaced herself all the morning and again during the afternoon, and having been grotesquely polite to the others (when it was necessary to speak to them) at mid-day dinner,

Tiny reappeared at tea in another frock and flying signals of peace. She seemed anxious to acquiesce with things that were said. So Erskine forced jokes which were sufficiently terrible in themselves, but they served a good purpose very well. Christina recovered her old form, and after tea made a winsome assault upon no less redoubtable a defender of his own inclinations than her brother Herbert. Him she successfully importuned to take her to church in the evening, although not to the church close at hand, where there was never necessarily any service in the rector's absence. Tiny, however, had heard from her friends in the village of a gifted young Irishman who wore a stole and held forth extempore in a neighbouring parish; they found their way to it across the twilit fields. They did not return till after nine, when Christina seemed much brighter than before. Her brightness, however, was seemingly more grateful to Mr. than to Mrs. Holland, who enticed her

brother into the garden after supper, to ask him whether Tiny had not mentioned Lord Manister.

“Why, yes, she did just mention him,” said Herbert; “but that’s all. I wasn’t going to say a word about the joker, and just as we came back to the drive here she got a hold of my arm and thanked me for not having asked her any questions; so I was glad I hadn’t. She said she wasn’t by any means proud of herself, and that she wanted to forget the whole thing, if we’d only let her. She doesn’t want to be bothered about it by anybody. Those were her very words, as we came up the drive. She was jolly enough all the way there, talking mostly about Wallandoon. You’ll have noticed how keen she is on the station ever since she went up there with the governor last April; I think the old place was a treat to her after Melbourne, to tell you the truth.”

Ruth nodded, as much as to say that she

knew. She asked, however, whether Tiny had talked also of Wallandoon on the way home.

“No ; she was a bit quiet on the way home. I think the sermon must have made an impression on her, but I didn’t hear it myself ; I put in a sleep instead. In the hymns, though, she sang out immense—by ghost, as if she meant it ! I rather wish I’d heard the sermon,” remarked Herbert, thoughtfully, “because it seemed to set her thinking. I believe she’s given to thinking of those things now and then ; I shouldn’t be surprised to see her go religious some day, if she don’t marry ; I’d rather she did, too, than marry a thing like Manister !”

The next day was their last at Essingham, for which not even Ruth could grieve, in view of recent events. The day, however, was its own consolation ; it was cold and dull and damp, though not actually wet, so that Erskine, who spent the greater part of the morning in front of a barometer, had hopes of some final setts in the

afternoon, when the Willoughbys were coming to say good-bye. Nor was he disappointed when the time arrived, though the court was dead and the light bad ; his own service was the more telling under these conditions. But to the two girls, who had been brought up to better things, it was a repulsive day from all points of view, and they were very glad to spend the morning in packing-up before a hearty fire.

“This is the kind of thing that makes one sigh for Wallandoon,” Tiny happened to say, once, as she stood looking out of the window at gray sky and sullied trees. The thought was spoken just as it came into her head with an imaginary beam of bush sunshine. There was no other thought behind it—no human mote in that sunbeam, certainly. But Ruth had raised her head swiftly from the trunk over which she was bending, and she knelt gazing at her sister’s back as a dog pricks its ears.

“Why Wallandoon? Why not Melbourne?”

“Because I have had enough of Melbourne,” replied Christina quietly, and without turning round.

“I thought you took so kindly to it?”

“Perhaps I did; I have taken kindly to many things that were bad for me in my time. And that’s all the more reason why I should hanker after Wallandoon. I only wish we could all go back there to live!”

“Well, I must say I shouldn’t care to live there now,” remarked Ruth, with a little laugh; “and I don’t see how you could like it either, after civilisation.”

“Ah, that’s because you never cared for the station as I did,” replied Christina, with her back still turned; “you liked the verandah better than the run, and you hated the dust from the sheep when you were riding. I can smell it now! Just think: they’ll be in the middle of shearing by this time. They were going to have thirty-six shearers on the board, and they

expected the best clip they've had for years. Can't you hear the blades clicking and the tar-boys tearing down the board, and the bales being heaved about at the back of the shed—or see the fleeces thrown out on the table, and rolled up and bounced into the bins—and father drafting in a cloud of dust at the yards? Can't I! Many's the time I've brought him a mob of woollies myself. And how good the pannikin of tea was, and the shearer's bun! I can taste 'em now. You never cared for tea in a pannikin. Yet perhaps if you'd ever gone back to see the place since we left it, as I did, you might be as keen on it as I am. I own I wasn't so keen when we lived there. When I went back and saw it the other day, though, I thought it the best place in the world; and you would, too."

"Is Jack Swift managing it now?" Ruth asked, indifferently.

"You knew he was."

"Really I'm afraid I don't know much about

it; but if you're so fond of the place as all that, Tiny, I should just marry Jack Swift, and live there ever after."

"I suppose you're joking," said the young girl, rather scornfully; "but in case you aren't, perhaps it will relieve you to hear that if ever I do marry, I shall marry a man—not a place."

And she turned round and stared hard through another window, which commanded a view of the Mundham gates and grounds; and Ruth made no more jokes; but neither, on the other hand, did Tiny expatiate any further on the attractions of station life at Wallandoon.

The Willoughbys came in the afternoon, when Mrs. Willoughby was severely disappointed, owing to the rudeness of Christina, who had disappeared mysteriously, although she knew that these people were coming. Mrs. Willoughby had seen her last leaving the cricket-ground at Mundham under the wing of Lady Dromard—Mrs. Willoughby had looked forward immensely to

seeing her again. But Christina had gone out, and none knew whither; the visitor's idea was some private engagement at the hall; and this was not the only idea she expressed, a little too freely for the entire ease of Christina's sister. Happily they were only ideas. Mrs. Willoughby knew nothing.

Tiny, as it turned out later, had spent the whole afternoon in the village, saying good-bye to her friends there. Ruth found this rather difficult to believe, as she had heard so little of the friends in question. Nevertheless it was strictly true, and Tiny had taken tea with Mrs. Clapperton, whose tears she had kissed away when they said good-bye; but that was only the end of a scene which would have been a revelation to some who prided themselves on knowing their Tiny as well as anyone could know so unaccountable a person. At dinner that evening she seemed chastened and subdued, yet her temper, certainly, had never been sweeter. It was noticeable that

while she had a responsive smile for most things that were said, she made fun of nothing herself; and she was far too fond of making fun of everything. But for two whole days her moods had come and gone like the shadows of the clouds when sun and wind are strong together; and the last of her whims was not the least puzzling at the time. Later, Ruth read it to her own extreme satisfaction; but at the time it did seem odd to her that anyone should desire a walk on so chilly and unattractive a night. Yet when they had left the men to themselves, this was what Tiny said she would like above all things. And Ruth, who humoured her, had her reward.

For she found herself being led through the churchyard; and when she hesitated as they came to the notice to trespassers, Tiny muttered, in a dare-devil way :

“Lady Dromard gave me leave to come this way whenever I liked, and I mean to make use of my privilege while I can. I want to see the

hall once again—it has a sort of fascination for me !”

More amazed than before, Ruth followed her leader up the western slope of Gallow Hill. The night was so dark that they heard the rustle of the beeches on top before they could discern their branches against the sky; and standing under them presently, panting from their climb, they gazed down upon a double row of warm lights embedded in blackness. These were the hall windows, in even tier, with here and there one missing, like the broken teeth of a comb. Outline the building had none; only the windows were bitten upon a sable canvas in ruddy orange and glimmering yellow, from which there was just enough reflection on the lawn and shrubs to chain them to earth in the mind of one who watched.

“Only the windows,” murmured Tiny, musingly. “Those windows mean to haunt me for the rest of my time.”

"I wish it were moonlight," Ruth said. "I wish we could see everything."

"No, I like it best as it is," remarked Tiny, after further meditation. "It leaves something to your imagination. Those windows are going to leave my imagination uncommonly well off!"

They stood together in silence, and the beeches talked in whispers above them. When Ruth spoke next, she whispered too, as though they were just outside those lighted windows:

"Yet you would rather live at Wallandoon than anywhere else on earth!"

Tiny said nothing to that; but after it, at a distance, there came a sigh.

"What's the matter, Ruth?"

"I'd rather not tell you, dear; it might make you angry."

"I think I like being made angry just at present," said Christina, with a little laugh; "but you've spiked my guns by saying that first; you are quite safe, my dear."

“ Then I was thinking—I couldn’t help thinking—that one day you might have been mistress——”

“ Of the windows? Then it’s high time we turned our backs on them. That’s just what I was thinking myself ! ”

CHAPTER XV.

THE INVISIBLE IDEAL.

ON the flags of a London square, some days later, Ruth repeated the sigh that had succeeded on Gallow Hill, and once more Christina asked her what was the matter.

“ I was thinking,” said Ruth, with a confidence born of the former occasion, “ that one day all this, too, would have been more or less yours.”

“ All what, pray ? ”

“ Every brick and slate that you can see ! All this is part of the Dromard estate ; they own every inch hereabouts.”

Christina’s next remark was a perfectly pleasant one in itself, only it referred to a totally different matter. And thus she treated

poor Ruth. At other times she would herself rush into the subject without warning, and out of it the moment it wearied or annoyed her; to follow her closely in and out required a nimble tact indeed. Nor was it easy to know always the right thing to say, or at all delightful to feel that the right thing to-day might be the wrong thing to-morrow. But into this one subject Ruth was as ready to enter at a hint from Tiny as she was now contented to quit it at her caprice. The elder sister's patience and good-temper were alike wonderful, but still more wonderful was her faith. Instinctively she felt that all was not over between Tiny and Lord Manister, and like many people who do not pretend to be clever, and are fond of saying so, she believed immensely in her instincts. It must not, however, be forgotten that her wishes for Tiny were the very best she could conceive; and it should be remembered that she had nobody but Tiny to watch over and care for, to

think about and make plans for, during the long days when Erskine was in the City. This was the great excuse for Ruth, which never occurred to her husband, and was unknown even to herself. Christina was her baby; and a very troublesome bad baby it was.

But what could you expect? The girl was sufficiently worried and unsettled; she was suffering from those upsetting fluctuations of mind which few of her kind entirely escape, but which are violent in characters that have grown with the emotional side to the sun and the intellectual side to the wall. In such a case the mind remains hard and green, while the emotions ripen earlier than need be; and the fault is the gardener's; and the gardener is the girl's mother. Now Mrs. Luttrell was a soulless but ladylike nonentity, with an eye naturally blind to the soul in her girls. All she herself had taught them was an unaffected manner and the necessity of becoming married. So Ruth had

married both early and well, by the favour of the gods, and Christina had restored the average by committing more follies of all sizes than would appear possible in the time. That in which Lord Manister was concerned had doubtless been the most important of the series, but its sting lay greatly in its notoriety. It had caused a light-hearted girl to see herself suddenly in the pupils of many eyes, and to recoil in shame from her own littleness. It had made her hate both herself and the owners of all those eyes, but men especially, of whom she had seen far too much in a short space of time. What she had done in England only heightened her poor opinion of herself, now that it was done. She had seen her way to an incredibly sweet revenge, only to find it incredibly bitter. In striking hard she had hurt herself most, as Erskine had divined ; instead of satisfying her naturally vindictive feeling towards Lord Manister, that blow had killed it. Now she forgave him freely, but found

it impossible to forgive herself; and so the generosity that was in a disordered heart asserted itself, because she had omitted to allow for it, not knowing it was there. Worse things asserted themselves too, such as the very solid attractions of the position which might have been hers; to these she could not help being fully alive, though this was one more reason why she hated herself. Her first judgment on herself, if a mere reaction at the beginning, became ratified and hardened as time went on. She became what she had never been before, even when notoriety had made her reckless — an introspective girl. And that made her twisty and queer and unaccountable; for, to be introspective with equanimity, you must have a bluff belief in yourself, which is not necessarily conceit, but Tiny was not blessed with it.

“She has lost her sense of fun—that’s the worst part of the whole business!” exclaimed Erskine one night, when Christina had gone early

to bed, as she always would now. "She has ceased to be amusing or easily amused. The empty town is boring her to the bone, and if I don't fix up our Lisbon trip we shall have her wanting to go back to Australia. However, I am bound to be in Lisbon by the end of next month, and I'm keener than ever on having you two with me. I know the ropes out there, and I could promise you both a good time—but that depends on Tiny. Let us hope the Bay will blow the cobwebs out of her head; she wasn't made to be sentimental. I only wish I could get her to jeer at things as she used before we went to Essingham and while we were there!"

"Don't you think it's rather a good thing she has dropped that?" Ruth asked. "She had no respect for anything in those days."

"And her humour saved her! Pray what does she respect now?"

"Two or three people that I know of—my

lord and master for one, and another person who is only a lord."

"Look here, Ruth, I don't believe it!" cried Erskine, who by this time was pacing his study floor. "Why, she hasn't set eyes on him since the day she refused him—with variations."

"I know—but she's had time to reflect."

"Then I hope and pray she may never have the opportunity to recant!"

"Well, I won't deny that I hope differently," replied Ruth quietly; "but I've no reason to suppose there's any chance of it; and whatever happens, Erskine, you needn't be afraid of my—of my meddling any more."

"My dear girl, I know that," said he, cordially enough; "but of course you tell her you're sorry for this, and you wish that. It's only natural that you should."

"Ah, I daren't say as much to her as you think," said Ruth with a nod and a smile; for she was glad to know more than he did, here and

there. "You needn't be afraid of me; I have little enough influence over her. She has only once opened her heart to me—once, and that's all."

Which was perfectly true, at the time.

But a few days later the restless girl was seized with a sudden desire to spend her money (which is really a good thing to do when you are troubled, if like Christina you have the money to spend); and as her most irregular desires were sure to be gratified by Ruth when they were not quite impossible, this whim was immediately indulged. It was rather late in the afternoon, but, on the other hand, the afternoon was extremely fine; and it was a Thursday, when men stay late in Lombard Street on account of next day's outward mails. Consequently there was no occasion for hurry; and so fascinated was Christina with the attractions and temptations of several well-known establishments, and last, as well as most of all, with those of the Stores, that it

was golden evening before they breathed again the comparatively fresh air of Victoria Street. It was like Christina to wish, at that hour, to walk home, and "through as many parks as possible;" it was even more like her to be extravagantly delighted with the first of these, and to insist on "shouting" Ruth a penny chair overlooking the ornamental water in St. James's Park.

Glad as she was to meet her sister's wishes, when she would only express them, which she was doing with inconvenient freedom this afternoon, Ruth did take exception to the penny chairs. Her feeling was, that for the two of them to sit down solemnly on two of those chairs was not an entirely nice thing to do, and certainly not a thing that she would care to be seen doing. Knowing, however, that this would be no argument with Tiny, she merely said that it would make them too late in getting home; and that happened to be worse than none.

"Erskine said he wouldn't be home till eight

o'clock; and he told us not to dress, as plain as he could speak," Tiny reminded her. "The other parks won't beat this; and you shall not be late, because I'll shout a hansom too."

So Ruth made no more objections, though she felt a sufficient number; and they sat down with their eyes towards the pale traces of a gentle undemonstrative September sunset, and were silent. Already the lamps were lighted in the Mall, where the trees were tanned and tattered by the change and fall of the leaf; at each end of the bridge, too, the lamps were lighted, and reflected below in palpitating pillars of fire; and every moment all the lights burnt brighter. Eastward a bluish haze mellowed trees and chimneys, making them seem more distant than they were; the noise of the traffic seemed more distant still, but it floated inward from the four corners, like the breaking of waves upon an islet; and here in the midst of it the stillness was strange, and certainly charming: only Tiny was

immoderately charmed. She sat so long without speaking that Ruth leant back and watched her curiously. Her face was raised to the pale pink sky, with wide-open eyes and tight-shut lips, as though the desires of her soul were written out in the tinted haze, as you may scratch with your finger in the bloom of a plum. She never spoke until the next quarter rang out from Westminster and was lingering in the quiet air, when she said, "Why have we never done this before, Ruth?"

"Well," answered Ruth, "I never did it myself before to-day; and I must own I think it's rather an odd thing to do."

"Ah well, Heaven may be odd—I hope it is!"

Ruth began to laugh. "My dear Tiny, you don't mean to say you call this heavenly?"

"It's near enough," said the young girl.

"But, my dear child, what stuff! The couples keep it sufficiently earthy, I should say—and the

smell of bad tobacco, and that child's trumpet, and the midges and gnats—but principally 'Arry and 'Arriet."

"Now I just like to see them," said Christina, for once the serious person of the two; "they're so awfully happy."

"Awfully, indeed!" cried Ruth, with a superior little laugh. "Very vulgarly happy, I should say!" And Tiny did not immediately reply, but her eyes had fallen as far as the fret-work of the shabby foliage in the Mall, over which the sky still glowed; and when she spoke, her words were the words of youthful speculation. She seemed, indeed, to be thinking aloud, and not at all sure of the sense of her thoughts.

"Very vulgarly happy!" she repeated, so long after the words had been spoken that it took Ruth some moments to recall them. "I am trying to decide whether there isn't something rather vulgar about all happiness of that kind—from the highest to the lowest.

Forgive me, dear—I don't mean anything the least bit personal—I find I don't mean a word I've said! I wasn't thinking of the happiness itself, so much, but of the desire for it. Oh, there must be something better for a girl to long for! There *is* something, if one only knew what it was; but nobody has ever shown me, for instance. Still, there must be something between misery and marriage . . . something higher."

Her eyes had not fallen, but they shone with tears.

"I don't know anything higher than marrying the man you love," said Ruth, honestly.

"Ah, if you love him! There is no need for *you* to know a higher happiness, even if one were possible in your case. But look at me!"

"You must marry, too," said Ruth, with facility.

"As I probably shall; but to be happy, as you are happy, one ought to be fond of the

person first, as you were ; and—well, I don't think I have ever in my life felt as you felt."

"Stuff!" said Ruth, but with as much tenderness as the word would carry.

"I wish it were," returned Christina sadly ; "it's the shameful truth. I have been going over things lately, and that's never a very cheerful employment in my case, but I think it has taught me my own heart this time. And I know now that I have never cared for anyone so much as for myself—much less for Lord Manister! If I had ever really cared for him, I couldn't have treated him as I have done—no, not if he had behaved fifty times worse in the beginning. I was flattered by him, but I think I liked him, though I know I was dazzled by—the different things. I would have married him; I never loved him—nor any of the others!"

"Ah well, Tiny, I am quite sure he loves you."

"Not very deeply, I hope ; I can't alto-

gether believe in him, and I don't much want to. It is bad enough to have one of them in deadly earnest," added Christina, after a pause, but with a laugh.

"Is one of them—I mean another one?" asked Ruth, correcting herself quickly.

Tiny nodded. She would not say who it was. "I don't care for him either—not enough," she, however, vouchsafed.

"Then you don't think of marrying him, I hope?"

"No, not the man I mean"—she shook her head sadly at trees and sky—"I like him too much to marry him unless I loved him. Only if anyone else asked me—someone I didn't perhaps care a scrap for—I don't know what mightn't happen. I feel so reckless sometimes, and so sick of everything! This comes of having played at it so often that one is incapable of the real thing; more than all, it comes of growing up with no higher ideal than a happy marriage. And

there must be something so much nobler—if one only knew what!”

Very wistfully her eyes wandered over the fading sky. The thin floating clouds, fast disappearing in the darkness, were not less vague than her desires, and not more lofty. Her soul was tugging at a chain that had been too seldom taut.

“I know of nothing—unless you’re a blue-stocking,” suggested poor Ruth, “or go in for Woman’s Rights!”

Then the sights and sounds of the place came suddenly home to Christina, and her eyes fell. A child rattled by with an iron hoop. A pleasure-boat villainously rowed passed with hoarse shouts through the pillar of fire below the bridge, and left it writhing. Her eyes as she lowered them were greeted with the smarting smoke of a cigar, and her nostrils with the smell that priced it. The smoker took a neighbouring chair, or rather two, for he was not without his companion.

Christina was the first to rise.

“ I have been talking utter nonsense to you, Ruth,” she whispered as they walked away; “ but it was kind of you to let me go on and on. One has sometimes to say a lot more than one means, to get out a little that one does mean; you must try to separate the little from the lot. I’ve been talking on tip-toe—it was good of you not to push me over ! ”

They crossed the bridge, throbbing beneath the tread of many feet; in the Mall, under the half-clothed trees, they hailed a hansom, and Ruth greeted her reflection in the side-mirror with a sigh of relief.

“ We should never have done this if we hadn’t been Australians,” she remarked, as though exceedingly ashamed of what they had done, as indeed she was.

“ Then that’s one more good reason for thanking Heaven we *are* Australians ! ” answered Tiny, with some of her old spirit. “ You may

think differently, Ruth, but for my part that's the one point on which I have still some lingering shreds of pride."

And that was how Tiny Luttrell opened her heart a second time to Ruth her sister, who was of less comfort to her even than before, because now her open heart was also the cradle of a waking soul. More things than one need name, for they must be obvious, had of late worked together towards this awakening, until now the soul tossed and struggled within a frivolous heart, and its cries were imperious, though ever inarticulate. To Ruth they were but faint echoes of the unintelligible; scarce hearing, she was contented not to try to understand. When Tiny said she had been "talking on tip-toe," to Ruth's mind that merely expressed a queer mood queerly. She did not see how accurately it figured the young soul straining upward; indeed, the accuracy was unconscious, and Christina herself did not see this.

Queer as it may have been, her mood had made for nobility, and was therefore memorable among the follies and worse of which, unhappily, she was still in the thick. It passed from her, not to return, yet to lodge, perhaps, where all that is good in our lives and hearts must surely gather and remain, until the spirit itself goes to complete and to inhabit a new temple, and we stand built afresh in the better image of God.

CHAPTER XVI.

FOREIGN SOIL.

THERE is in Cintra a good specimen of the purely Portuguese hotel, which is worth a trial if you can speak the language of the country and eat its meats. If you want to feel as much abroad as you are, this is the spot to promote that sensation. The whole concern is engagingly indigenous. They will give you a dinner of which every course (there must be nearly twenty) has the twofold charm of novelty and mystery combined ; and you shall dine in a room where it is safe (if unsportsmanlike) to criticise aloud your fellow-diners, when their ways are most notably not your ways. Then after dinner you may make music in a pleasant drawing-room, or saunter in the quaint garden behind the hotel ;

only remember that the garden has a view, which is necessarily lost at night.

The view is good, and it improves as the day wears on, by reason of the beetling crag that stands between Cintra and the morning sun. So close is this crag to the town, and so sheer, that at dawn it looms the highest mountain on earth; but with the afternoon sunlight streaming on its face you see it for what it is, and there is much in the sight to satisfy the eye. Half-way up, the vast wall is forested with fir-trees, picked out with bright villas, and streaked with the white lines of ascending roads. The upper portion is of granite, rugged and bare and iron-gray. The topmost angle is surmounted by square towers and battlements that seem a part of the peak, as indeed they are, since the Moors who made them hewed the stones from the spot; and the serrated crest notches the sky like a crown on a hoary head. Finer effects may recur very readily to the travelled eye, but to one too used

to flat regions this is fine enough : thus Tiny Luttrell was in love with Cintra from the moment when she and Ruth and Erskine first set foot in the garden of the Portuguese hotel, and let their eyes climb up the sunlit face of the rock.

They were a merrier party now than when leaving Plymouth. They had left fog and damp behind them (it was near the end of October), and steamed back to summer in a couple of days ; and that alone was inspiriting. Then they had already stayed a day or two in Lisbon, where Erskine had spent as many years when Ruth was an infant at the other end of the world, so that he was naturally a good guide. There, too, Ruth and Tiny made some friends, being charmingly treated by people with whom they were unable to converse, while Erskine attended to the business matter which had brought him over. The girls were not sorry to hear that this matter was hanging fire, as such matters have a way of doing in Lisbon, for they were

enjoying themselves thoroughly. Ruth felt prouder than ever of her big husband when she saw him among his Portuguese friends, and she thought him very clever to speak their language so fluently. As for Tiny, she seemed herself again; she was willing to be amused, and luckily there was much to amuse her. Much, on the other hand, she could seriously admire, and her high opinion of Portugal was itself amusing after the fault she had found with another country; she even made comparisons between the two, which gave considerable pleasure when translated by Erskine. Cintra pleased her most, however. She delighted in the hotel where there were no English tongues but their own; she even pretended to enjoy the dinner. So Erskine felt proud of his choice of quarters; only he missed his English paper, and had to go to the English hotel and purchase unnecessary refreshment on the chance of a glimpse of one. Your man-Briton abroad is miserable without

that. It is a male weakness entirely. Holland took with him on that pilgrimage no sympathy from the ladies, who only derided him when he came back confessing that he had thrown his money away, as some other fellow was staying at the English inn and reading the paper in his room.

“But I’m very sorry there’s another Englishman in the place,” announced Christina; “though I suppose one ought to be thankful he didn’t choose our hotel. It is something like being abroad, staying here; one more Englishman would have spoilt the fun.”

“When you see the steeds I’ve ordered for the morning,” said Erskine, with a laugh, “you’ll feel more abroad than ever.”

And they did, indeed, when the morning came; for their steeds were three small asses in charge of a dark-eyed child who was whacking them for his amusement while he smoked a cigarette. A small but picturesque crowd had collected in the street to see the start, and were greatly

entertained by the spectacle of the Senhor Inglez (a giant among them) astride a donkey little taller than a big dog. Interest was also shown in the camera-legs, which Erskine carried like a lance in rest, while the camera itself was nursed by Christina, who had spoilt a power of plates in Lisbon without becoming discouraged. The small boy threw away his cigarette, and having asked Erskine for another, which was sternly denied him, smote each donkey in turn, and set the cavalcade in motion.

They passed the palace in the little market-place, and were unable to admire it; they passed the loathly prison, which is the worst feature of Cintra, and were duly abused by the prisoners at the barred windows; they were glad to reach the outskirts of the town, and to begin their ascent of the rock up which their eyes had already climbed. They were to devote the day to the ruined Moorish fort they had seen against the sky, and to the palace of Pena, which stands

on a peak hidden from the town; and Erskine, who was confident that they were all going to enjoy themselves very particularly, declared that the day was only worthy of the cause. There was not a cloud in the sky, and the weather was just warm enough for the work in hand. As the donkeys wended their way up the steep roads, Mr. Holland was advised to get off and carry his carrier; but he knew the Cintra donkey of old, and sat ignobly still. He also knew the Cintra donkey-boy, and aired his Portuguese upon the attendant imp, who passed on the way and greeted with jeers a professional friend waiting with only one donkey in front of a pretty house overlooking the road.

“Ah,” said Erskine, “that’s the English hotel; and no doubt that moke is for the opposition Senhor Inglez—whose name is Jackson.”

“Then pray let us push on,” cried Christina, anxiously. “Do you suppose he is coming our way, Erskine?”

“Most probably, to begin with; but he may turn off for Monserrat or the cork convent.”

“Let us hope so. If he should pass us, Erskine, just talk Portuguese to us as loud as ever you can!”

“Far better to hurry up and not be overtaken,” added Ruth, who was thinking of her appearance, with which she was far from satisfied.

Accordingly, the imp (with whose good looks Christina had already expressed herself as enamoured) was employed for some moments at his favourite occupation. But for the pursuing Englishman, however, Tiny, instead of leading the way upward, would have dismounted more than once to set up her camera; for low parapets were continually on their left, high walls on their right; and wherever there was a gap in the fir-trees growing below the parapets, a fresh view was presented of the town below. First it was a bird's-eye view of the palace, seen to better

advantage through the trees of the Rua do Duque Saldanha than before from the street; then a fair impression of the town as a whole, with its gay gardens and cheap-looking stuccoed houses; and then successive editions of Cintra, each one smaller than the last, and each with a wider tract of undulating brown land beyond, and a broader band of ocean at the horizon. Then they plunged into mountain gorges; there were no more distant views, but mighty walls on either side and reddening foliage interlacing overhead, as though woven upon the strip of pure blue sky. And the atmosphere was clear as distilled water in a crystal vessel; but in the shade the air had a sweet keenness, an inspiring pungency, under whose influence the enthusiast of the party grew inevitably eloquent in the praises of Portugal.

“I can’t tell you how I like it!” she said to Erskine, with a colour on her cheeks and a light in her eyes which alone seemed worth the

voyage. "I call it a real good country which has never had justice done to it. If I could write, I would boom it. Of course, I haven't seen Italy or Switzerland, nor yet France, but I have seen England. If I were condemned to live in Europe at all, I'd rather live at this end of it than at yours, Erskine. Look at the climate—it's as good as our Australian climate, and very like it—and this is all but November. You have no such air in England, even in summer, but when you think of what we left behind us the other day, it's ditch-water unto wine compared with this. Ah, what a day it is, and what a place, and how fresh and queer and un-English the whole thing is!"

"I am perhaps spoiling it for you," suggested Erskine, apologetically, "by being not un-English myself?"

"No, Erskine, it's only me you're spoiling," returned the girl unexpectedly, and with a grateful smile for Ruth as well. "But I don't

know another Briton—Home or Colonial—who wouldn't rather spoil the day and the place for me."

"That's a pity, because I happen to smell the blood of an Englishman at this moment—at least I hear his donkey."

They stopped to listen, and following hoofs were plainly audible.

"Then he hasn't turned off for the other places!" exclaimed Ruth, smoothing her skirt.

Erskine shrugged his shoulders like a native of the country. "No, he is evidently bound for our port; and as the chances are that he is under sixteen stone, he's sure to overtake us. It is I that am keeping you all back."

"We won't look round," exclaimed Tiny, decisively; "and you shall shout at us in Portuguese as he comes up, and we'll say 'Sim, Senhor!'"

So they kept their eyes most rigorously in front of them; and such was the authority of

Tiny that Erskine was in the midst of an absurd speech in Portuguese when they were overtaken. That harangue was interrupted by the voice of the interloping Englishman; and was never resumed, as the voice was Lord Manister's.

The meeting was plainly an embarrassing one for all concerned, but it had at least the appearance of a very singular coincidence: and nothing will go further in conversation than the slightest or most commonplace coincidence. You must be very nervous indeed if you are incapable of expressing your surprise, of which much may be made, while the little bit of personal history to follow need not entail a severe intellectual effort. Lord Manister accounted very simply, if a little eagerly, for his presence in Portugal; he went on to explain that he had heard much of Cintra, but not, as he was glad to find, one word too much. Personally he was delighted and charmed. Was not Mrs. Holland charmed and delighted? It

was at Ruth's side that Lord Manister rode forward, falling into the position very naturally indeed.

Quite as naturally the other two dropped behind. "So now I suppose your day will be spoilt, Tiny," murmured Erskine, with a wry smile.

"The day is doomed—unless he has the good taste to see he isn't wanted."

"Well, I wouldn't let him see that, even if he does bore you," said Erskine, who had his doubts on this point. "I don't think he's looking very well," he added, meditatively.

As for Christina, she was staring fixedly at Lord Manister's back: for once, however, his excellent attire earned no gibe from her: and while she was still seeking for some more convincing mode of parading her immutable indifference towards that young man, a turn in the road brought them suddenly before the gates of Pena. The four closed up, and rode through the gates

abreast; and presently dismounting, they left their small steeds to the sticks of the Cintra donkey-boys, and walked together up the broad sloping path.

“By the way,” remarked Holland, “I was told there was only one other Englishman in Cintra at the moment—a man of the name of Jackson; have you arrived this morning?”

“I am afraid—I’m Jackson!” confessed Manister, with a blush and a noisy laugh.

“Oh, I see,” said Mr. Holland, laughing also; and he saw a good deal.

“Of course you have to do that sometimes; I can quite understand it,” Ruth said in a sympathetic voice. “Still, I think we must call you Mr. Jackson!” she added slyly.

Christina said nothing at all. Her extreme silence and self-possession hardly tended to promote the common comfort; her only comment on Lord Manister’s *alias* was a somewhat scornful smile. As they all pressed upward by

well-kept paths, in the shadow of tall fir-trees, she kept assiduously by Erskine's side. The ascent, however, was steep enough to touch the breath, and conversation was for some minutes neither a pleasure nor a necessity. Then, above the firs, the palace of Pena reared hoary head and granite shoulders; for, like the ruined fort visible from the town below, the palace is built upon the summit of a rock. Still a steeper climb, and the party stood looking down upon the fir-trees which had just shadowed them, with their backs to the palace walls, that seem, and often are, a part of the rugged peak itself. For this is a palace not only founded on a rock, and on the rock's topmost crag, but the foundation has itself supplied so many features ready-made that Nature and the Moors may be said to have collaborated in its making. Three of the party having taken breath played catch with this idea; but Christina barely listened. Her attitude was regrettable, but not unnatural.

In the last place on earth where she would have expected to meet anyone she knew, she had met the last person whom she expected to meet anywhere. She remembered telling him of her mooted trip to Portugal with the Hollands, she remembered also his telling her to be sure to go to Cintra ; her recollection of the conversation in question, and of Lady Almeric's conservatory, where it had taken place, was sufficiently clear, now that she thought of it ; but certainly she had never thought of it since. Had he ? She might have mentioned the time when the trip was likely to take place ; she was not so sure of this, but it seemed likely ; and in that case was a certain explanation of his sojourn in Portugal, other than the explanation he had been so careful to give, either preposterous in itself or the mere suggestion of her own vanity ?

These questions were now worrying Christina as she had seldom been worried before, even about Lord Manister, who had been much in her

thoughts for many weeks past. Yet Manister was not the only person on her mind at the moment. Just before leaving London she had experienced the fulfilment of a prophecy, by receiving from Countess Dromard a stare as stony as the pavement they met on, which was near enough to Piccadilly to inspire a superstitious respect for sibylline Mrs. Willoughby. In the disagreeable moment following, Tiny's thoughts had flown straight to that lady—indeed, her only remark at the time had been “Good old Mrs. Willoughby!”—to which Ruth (who suffered at Tiny's side, and for her part turned positively faint with mortification) had been in no condition to reply. Little as she showed it, however, Christina had felt the affront far more keenly than Ruth—chiefly because she took it all to herself, and was unable to think it utterly undeserved. In any event, she felt it now. It was but the other day that the Countess had cut her. The wound was still tender; the sight

of Lord Manister scrubbed it cruelly. And long afterwards the scar had its own little place among the forces driving Christina in a certain direction, whether she went on feeling it or not.

Hardly less preoccupied than herself was the man whose side Christina would not leave. Wherefore, though the place was old ground to him, as a guide he was instructive rather than amusing. He spoke the requisite Portuguese to the janitors, whose stock facts he also translated into intelligible English; he led the way up the winding staircase of the round tower, and from the giddy gallery at the top he did not omit to point out Torres Vedras and such-like landmarks; descending, he had stock facts of his own connected with chapel and sacristy, but he failed to make them interesting. A paid guide could not have been more perfunctory in method, though it is certain that the most entertaining showmanship would have failed to entertain Erskine's hearers, each one of whom

was more or less nervous and ill-at-ease. He himself was thinking only of Christina, who would not leave his side. He saw her watching Lord Manister; though she would hardly speak to him, he saw pity in her glance. He heard Lord Manister talking volubly to Ruth; he did not know about what, and he wondered if Manister knew himself. Erskine did not understand. The girl seemed to care, and if she did—if this thing was to be—he would never say another word against it. If she cared, there would not be another word to say, save in joyous and loving congratulation. That was the whole question: whether she cared. For the first time, Erskine was not sure; it was a toss-up in his mind whether Tiny was sure herself. Certainly there seemed to be hope for the man who was being watched yet avoided; however, Erskine was resolved to give him the very first opportunity of learning his fate.

Accordingly, he reminded Tiny that he had

been carrying the camera ever since they had dismounted : and was his arm to ache for nothing ? The suggestion of the square tower, with the steps below, as an admirable target, also came from Erskine. Lord Manister helped to take the photograph : That, again, was Erskine's doing ; and he did even more. When they all turned their backs on Pena, and their faces to the ruin on the opposite peak, it was her husband who rode ahead with Ruth. His reward was the smile of an angel over a lost soul saved. He returned the smile cynically. But round the first corner he belaboured his ass, with the camera-legs, and shot ahead, Ruth gladly following.

In the hollow between the peaks the bridle-path passes an ancient and picturesque mosque, with a lime-tree growing in the centre : from this the ruin derives a roof in summer, a carpet in winter, and had now a little of each.

“ What a romantic place ! ” said Ruth, peeping in. Her husband had waited for her to do so.

“Then let us leave it to more romantic people,” he answered, dropping the tripod in the doorway. “They may like to have a photograph of it—for every reason! You and I had better climb up to the fort and chuck stones into Cintra till they come.”

This looked quite possible when at last they sat perched upon the antique battlements; they seemed so to overhang the little town. Erskine lit a Portuguese cigarette, which the wind finished for him in a minute. Ruth kept a hand upon her hat. Then she spoke out, with the wind whistling between their faces.

“Erskine, I know what you think—that this isn’t an accident!”

“Of course it isn’t.”

“And I daresay you think *I* have had something to do with it?”

“Have you, I wonder? You may easily have said that we thought of coming here—quite innocently, you know.”

“ Then I never said so at all. I thought—you know what I thought would have happened last August. Erskine, I have had absolutely nothing to do with it this time ! ”

“ My dear, you needn’t say that. I know neither you nor Tiny have had anything to do with it—so far as you are aware ; but Tiny must have told him we were coming here, and this is his roundabout dodge of seeing her again. Certainly that looks as if he were in earnest.”

“ I always said he was.”

“ And as for Tiny, I don’t pretend to make her out. You see, they do not come. I shouldn’t be surprised at anything.”

“ No more should I ; but I should be thankful. Even when I hid things from you, Erskine, I never pretended I shouldn’t be thankful if this happened, did I ? Oh, and you’ll be thankful, too, when you see them happy—as we are happy ! ”

Holland sat for some minutes with bent head, picking lichen from granite.

“My dear girl,” he said at length, and tenderly, “don’t let us talk any more about it. I daresay I have taken a rotten view of it all along. I only thought—that he didn’t deserve her, and that neither of them could care enough. It seems I was more or less wrong; but there is nothing further to be said until we know.”

He leant over the battlements, gazing down into the toy town below. Ruth brooked his silence for a time. Then he heard her saying :

“They are a very long while. He’s certainly helping her to take a photograph.”

“I hope he’ll get a negative,” said Erskine, with a laugh.

They came at last.

“How long have you been there, Erskine?” shouted Tiny, from below. She held one end of the tripod, by which Manister was tugging her uphill.

“About ten minutes.”

“Not as much, Erskine,” said Ruth.

“We have been photographing that charming mosque,” Manister said, as he set down the camera and wiped his forehead; “you meant us to, didn’t you, Holland?”

“Of course I did.”

“And have you got a negative?” asked poor Ruth.

“A month to make up her mind!” cried Erskine Holland, on hearing at second hand what had actually happened in the mosque. “No wonder he wouldn’t stay and dine; and no wonder he is going back to Lisbon to-morrow. By Jove! he *must* be fond of her to stand it at all. To go and wait a month!”

“He offered to wait six,” said Ruth.

“Then he’s a fool,” said Erskine, quietly. “Tell me, Ruth, is it a thing one may speak about? One would like, of course, to say some-

thing pleasant. After all, it's very like an engagement; and I could at least tell her that I like him. I did like him to-day. Under the circumstances he behaved capitally; only I do think him a fool not to have insisted on her deciding one way or the other."

"I don't think I'd mention the matter unless she does," Ruth said, doubtfully. "She told me to tell you she would rather not speak of it at present. You see, she has thought of you already! She says you will find her the same as ever, if only you will try to look as though you didn't know anything about it. She declares that she means to make the most of her time for the next month, wherever she may be; and she hopes you have ordered the donkeys for to-morrow. Still, she is troubled; and if she thought you didn't disapprove—if she thought you approved—I can see that it would make a difference to her. She thinks so much of your opinion—only she doesn't want to speak to you

herself about this until it is a settled thing. But if you would send her your blessing, dear, I know, she would appreciate that."

"Then take it to her, by all means," said Erskine, heartily enough. "Tell her I think she is very wise to have left it open—you needn't say what I think of Manister for letting her do so. But you may say, if she likes to hear it, that I think him a jolly good fellow, who will make her very happy, if she can really feel she cares for him. Tell her it all hangs on that. That's what we have to impress upon her; and you're the proper person to do so. I only felt one ought to say something pleasant. Wait a moment—tell her I'll do my best to give her a good time until December, if none of us are ever to have one again!"

Tiny was sitting at the dressing-table in her room, slowly and deliberately burning a photograph in the flame of a candle. The photograph was on a yellow mount, which Ruth remembered;

and as she drew near, Tiny turned its face downward to the flame, which smacked still more of a former occasion.

“Tiny!” cried Ruth in alarm, laying her hand on the young girl’s shoulder. “What on earth are you burning, dear?”

“My boats,” replied Christina, grimly; and turning the photograph over, the face of Jack Swift was still uncharred.

“So you’ve carried *his* photograph with you all this time?”

“He is as good a friend as I shall ever have.”

“Then why burn him, if he is only a friend?”

“Perhaps he would like to be more; and perhaps there was once a moment when he might have been. But now I shall duly marry Lord Manister—if he has patience.”

“Then why keep poor Lord Manister in suspense, Tiny dearest?”

“Because I’m not in love with him; and I question whether he’s as much in love with me as he imagines—I told him so.”

“As it is, you may find it difficult to draw back.”

“Exactly; so I am burning my boats. Jack, my dear, that’s the last of you!”

Her voice satisfied Ruth, who, however, could see no more of her face than the curve of her cheek, and beyond it the blackened film curling from the burning cardboard.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE HIGH SEAS.

“HE’S done it at last!”

Erskine brandished a letter as he spoke, and then leant back in his chair with a guffaw that alarmed the Portuguese waiters. The letter was from Herbert Luttrell, a Cambridge man of one month’s standing, of whose academic outset too little had been heard. His sisters were anxious to know what it was that he had done at last; they put this question in the same breath.

“Oh, it might be worse,” said Erskine, cheerfully. “He has stopped short of murder!”

“We should like to know how far he got,” Tiny said, while Ruth held out an eager hand for the letter.

“I don’t think you must read it, my dear;

but the fact is, he has at last filled up somebody's eye!"

Tiny breathed a sigh of relief.

"Is he in prison?" asked Ruth.

"No, not yet; but I am afraid he must be in bad odour, though perhaps not with everybody."

"Whose was the eye?" Christina wanted to know.

"The proctor's!" suggested Ruth.

"Not yet, again—you must give the poor boy time, my dear. It may be the proctor's turn next, but at present your little brother has contented himself with filling the eye of the man who was coaching his College Trials. It's a time-honoured privilege of the coach to use free language to his crew, and it doesn't give offence as a rule; but it seems to have offended Herbert. Young Australia don't like being sworn at, and Herbert admits that he swore back from his thwart, and said that he fancied he was as good a man as the coach, but he

hoped to find out when they got to the boat-house. They did find out; and Herbert has at last filled up an Old Country eye; and for my part I don't think the less of him for doing so."

"The less!" cried Tiny, whose blue eyes were alight. "*I* think all the more of him. I'm proud of Herbs! You have too many of those savage old customs, Erskine; you need Young Australia to come and knock them on the head!"

"Well, as long as he doesn't knock a proctor on the head, as Ruth seems to fear! If he does that, there's an end of him so far as Cambridge is concerned. He tells me the eye was unpopular, otherwise I'm afraid he would have had a warm time of it; though a quick fist and an arm that's stronger than it looks are wonderful things for winning the respect of men, even in these days."

"And mayn't we really see the letter?" Tiny said wistfully.

Erskine shook his head.

“I am very sorry, but I’m afraid I must treat it as private. It’s a verbatim report. I can only tell you that Herbert seems to have been justified, more or less, though he is perhaps too modest to report himself as fully as he reports the eye. He says nothing else of any consequence. He doesn’t mention work of any kind; but he’s not there only, or even primarily, to pass exams. On the whole, we mustn’t fret about the eye, so long as the dear boy keeps his hands off the authorities.”

Their hotel was no longer at Cintra, but in Lisbon, where Mr. Holland was being sadly delayed by the business men of the most un-business-like capital in Europe. Already it was the middle of November. They had left Cintra as long ago as the 5th of the month, expecting to sail from Lisbon on the 7th; but out of his experience Erskine ought to have known better. It is true that on landing in the country he had attended first to business. The business was

connected with the forming of a company for certain operations on Portuguese territory in the East, the capital coming from London: a board was necessary in both cities, and very necessary indeed were certain negotiations between the London directors, as represented by Erskine Holland, and their colleagues in Lisbon. The latter had promised to do much while Erskine was at Cintra, and duly did nothing until he returned; knowing their kind of old, he ought never to have gone. He quite deserved to have to wait and worry and smoke more Portuguese cigarettes than were either agreeable or good, with the women on his hands; with all his knowledge of the country and the people he might have known very well how it would be—as indeed Erskine was told in a letter from Lombard Street, where an amusing despatch of his from Cintra had rather irritated the senior partners.

Thus Mr. Holland had his own worries

throughout this trip, but it is a pleasure to affirm that his sister-in-law did not add to them after that first day at Cintra. Thenceforward she had behaved herself as a perfectly rational and even a contented being. She had appreciated the other sights of Cintra even more than Pena (which had hardly been given a fair chance), and most of all that gorgeous garden of Monserrat, where the trees of the world are grouped together, and among them the gum-trees which were so dear to Christina. She had even been overcome by a bloodthirsty desire to witness the bull-fight on the Sunday; and Erskine had taken her, because her present frame was not one to discourage; but it must be confessed that Tiny was disappointed by the tameness of this sport rather than revolted by its cruelty. Negatively she had been behaving better still: the Cintra donkey, the locality of the English hotel, and other associations of the first day, never once perceptibly affected either her spirits or her

temper. She had shown, indeed, so dead a level of cheerfulness and good sense as to seem almost uninteresting after the accustomed undulations ; but in point of fact she had never been more interesting to those in her secret. She had promised to give Lord Manister his answer in a month, and meanwhile she was displaying all the even temper and equable spirits of settled happiness. She ate healthily, she declared that she slept well, and otherwise she was amazingly and consistently serene. That was her perversity, once more, but on this occasion her perversity admitted of an obvious explanation. The explanation was that she had never been in doubt about her decision, that in her heart she was more than satisfied, and that she had asked for a month's respite chiefly for freedom's sake. The matter was discussed no more between the sisters, because Tiny refused to discuss it, declaring that she had dismissed it from her mind till December. And to Erskine she never

once mentioned it while they were in Portugal, nor had she the least intention of doing so on the homeward voyage, which they were able ultimately to make within a week of the arrival of Herbert's letter.

But the voyage was rough, and Tiny happened to be a remarkably good sailor, which made her very tiresome once more. Holland had his hands full in attending to his wife in the cabin, while keeping an eye on her sister who would remain on deck. Through the worst of the weather the unreasonable girl clung like a limpet to the rail, staring seaward at the misty horizon, or downward at the milky wake, until her pale face was red and rough and sparkling with dried spray.

"I do wish you would come below," Erskine said to her, in a tone of entreaty, towards dusk on the second day, but by no means for the first time. "There's not another woman on deck; and you've chosen the one spot of the whole vessel where there's most motion."

Until he joined her, Tiny had indeed been the only soul on the hurricane-deck, where she stood leaning on the after-rail with eyes for nothing but the steamer's track. They were on the hem of the Bay, and the wind was ahead, so the boat was pitching; and you must be a good sailor to enjoy leaning over the after-rail with this motion—but that is what Christina was. The wind welded her garments to the wire network underneath, and loosened her hair, and lit lamps in her ears; but it seemed that she liked it, and that the long frothy trail had a strong fascination for her; for when she answered, it was without lifting her eyes from the sea.

“You see, I like being different from other people; that's what I go in for! Honestly, though, I love being up here, and I think you might let me stay. However, that's no reason why you should stay too—if it makes you feel uncomfortable.”

“Thanks, I think I am proof,” returned

Erskine, rather brusquely (for this is a point on which most men are either vain or sensitive); "but of course I'll leave you, if you prefer it."

"On the contrary, I should like you to stay," Christina murmured — in such a lonely little voice that Erskine stayed.

It was difficult to believe in this young lady's sincerity, however. She not only made no further remark herself, but refused to acknowledge one of Erskine's. Men do not like that either. Tiny's eyes had never been lifted from the endless race of white water, now rising as though to their feet, now sinking from under them as the steamer laboured end-on to the wind. Apparently she had forgotten that Erskine was there; as also that she had asked him to remain. He was on the point of leaving her to her reverie, when she swung round suddenly, with only one elbow on the rail, and looked up at him with a pout that turned slowly to a smile.

“Erskine, you’ve come and spoilt everything !”

“My dear child, I told you I would go if you liked, you know.”

“Ah, that was too late ; you’d spoilt it then. It won’t come back.”

“Do you mean that I have broken some spell ? If that’s the case, I am very sorry.”

“That won’t mend it—you can’t mend spells,” said Tiny, laughing ruefully. “Perhaps it’s as well you can’t ; and perhaps it’s a good thing you came,” she added, more briskly. “I had humbugged myself into thinking I was on my way back to Australia. That was all.”

“But if I were to go, mightn’t you humbug yourself again ?”

“I don’t think I want to,” the girl answered, thoughtfully ; “at any rate, I don’t want you to go. Don’t you think it’s jolly up here ? To me, it’s as good as a gallop up the bush—and I think we’re taking our fences splendidly ! But

it was jollier still, thinking that England was over there," nodding her head at the wake, "and that every five minutes or so it was a mile further away—instead of the other thing."

"Poor old England!"

"No, Erskine, I meant a mile nearer Australia—that was the jolly feeling," Tiny made haste to explain. "You know I didn't mean anything else—you know how I have enjoyed being with you and Ruth. Only I can't help wishing I was on my way back to Melbourne, instead of to Plymouth. I'd give so much to see Australia again."

"Well, so you will see it again."

Her eyes sped seaward as she shook her head.

"Why on earth shouldn't you?" said Erskine, laughing.

"You know why."

Now he saw her meaning, and it held his tongue. This was the subject on which he understood it to be her desire that they should not speak. To himself, moreover, it was a highly

unattractive topic, and he was thoroughly glad to have it ignored as it had been ; but if she alluded to the matter herself, that was another thing, and he must say something. So he said :

“ Is it really so certain, Tiny ? ”

“ On my part, absolutely. I’m only climbing down ! ”

Erskine was reminded of the pleasant things he had thought of saying to her at Cintra ; they had been by him so long that he found himself saying them now as though he meant every word.

“ My congratulations must keep till the proper time ; but when that comes, they may surprise you. My dear girl, I should like you to understand that you’re not the only person whose opinion has changed since we were at Essingham. If I may say so at this stage of the proceedings, and if it is any satisfaction to you to hear it, I for one am going to be very glad about this thing. I think him such a first-rate fellow, Tiny ! ”

For a moment Christina gazed acutely at her brother-in-law. "I wonder if that's sincere?" she said, reflectively. Then her eyes hurried back to the sea.

"I think he's a very good fellow indeed," said Erskine with emphasis.

The girl gave a little laugh. "Oh, he's all that; the question is, whether that's enough."

"It is if he really loves you—as I think he must."

"Oh, if it's enough for him to be in love!"

There followed a great pause, during which the thought of pleasant things to say was thrown overboard and left far astern.

"I only hope," Erskine said at last, with an earnest ring in his voice which was new to Christina, "that you are not going to make the greatest mistake of your life!"

"I hope not also."

"Ah, don't make light of it!" he cried impetuously. "If you marry without love you'll

ruin your life, I don't care who it is you marry ! To marry for affection, or for esteem, or for money—they're all equally bad ; there is no distinction. Take affection—for a time you might be as happy as if it were something more ; but remember that any day you might see somebody that you could really love. Then you would know the difference, and it would embitter your whole existence with a quiet, private, unsuspected bitterness, of which you can have no conception. And so much the worse if you have married somebody who is honestly and sufficiently fond of you. His love would cut you to the heart—because you could only pretend to return it—because your whole existence would be a living lie ! ”

He was extremely unlike himself. His voice trembled, and in the dying light his face was gray. These things made his words impressive, but the girl did not seem particularly impressed. Had she remembered the one

previous occasion when a similar conversation had taken place between them, the strangeness of his manner must have been driven home to her by contrast; but the contrast was a double one, and her own share in it kept her from thinking of the time when she had been serious, and he had not; and now, when he was more serious than she had ever known him, she met him with a frivolous laugh.

“ Well, really, Erskine, I’ve never heard you so terribly in earnest before! I think I had better not tell Ruth what you have said; my dear man, you speak as though you’d been there!”

It was some time before he laughed.

“ If only you yourself would be more in earnest, Tiny! You may say this comes badly from me. I know there has been more jest than earnest between me and you. But if I was never serious in my life before, I am now, and I want you, too, to take yourself seriously for once. You see, Tiny, I am not only an old

married man by this time, but I am your European parent as well. I am entitled to play the heavy father, and to give you a lecture when I think you need one. My dear child, I have been in the world about twice as long as you have, and I know men and have heard of women who have poisoned their whole lives by marrying with love on the other side only; and the greater their worldly goods, the greater has been their misery! And rather than see you do as they have done——” The sentence snapped. “You shan’t do it!” he exclaimed sharply. “You’re far too good to spoil yourself as others have done and are doing every day.”

“Who told you I was good?” inquired Christina, with a touch of the coquetry which even with him she could not entirely repress. “You never had it from me, most certainly. Let me tell you, Erskine, that I’m bad—bad—bad! And if I haven’t shocked you sufficiently already, it is evidently time that I did; so

you'll please to understand that if I marry Lord Manister, it is partly because I think I owe it to him ; otherwise it's for the main chance purely. And I think it's very unkind of you to make me confess all this," she added fretfully. " I never meant to speak to you about it at all. Only I can't bear you to think me better than I am."

Erskine shook his head sadly.

" At least you have a better side than this, Tiny—this is not you at all ! You love and admire all that is honest and noble, and fresh and free ; you should give that love and admiration a chance. But I'm not going to say any more to worry you. If you really with your eyes open are going to marry a man whom you do not love, I can only tell you that you will be doing at best a very cynical thing. And yet—I can understand it." This he added more to himself than to the girl.

He was turning away, but she laid a restraining hand upon his arm.

“Don’t go,” she exclaimed impulsively. “I can’t let you go when—when you understand me better than anyone else ever did—and when I am never, never going to speak to you like this again.”

“If only I could help you!”

“You cannot!” Tiny cried out. “I’m too far gone to be helped. I feel hopelessly bad and hard, and nobody can mend that. But if there’s one grain of goodness in my composition that wasn’t there when I came over to England, you may know, Erskine, if you care to know it, that it’s you, and you alone, who have put it there!”

“Nonsense,” he said; “what good have I done you?”

“You have talked sense to me, as only one other man ever did—and he wasn’t as clever as you are. You’ve given me books to read, and they’re the first good books I ever read in my life; you have dug a sort of oyster-knife into

my miserable ignorance ! You have been a real good pal to me, Erskine, and you must never turn your back on me, whatever I do. I know you never will. I believe in you as I believe in very few people on this foot-stool ; but there's one thing you can do for me now that will be even kinder than anything that you have ever done yet."

"There's nothing that I wouldn't do for you, Tiny," said Erskine, tenderly. "What is it?"

The corners of her mouth twitched—her eyes twinkled.

"It's not to say another serious word to me this month ! I know I began it this time ; I won't do so again. I'm trying to be happy in my own way, if you'll only let me. I'm trying to make the most of my time. When I'm really engaged, I shall need all the help and advice you can give me : for I mean to be very good to him, Erskine, I do indeed ! Then of

course I shall need to cultivate the finest manners; but until it actually comes off, I'm trying to forget about it—don't you see? I'm doing my level best to forget!"

What Erskine saw was the tears in her eyes, but he saw them only for an instant: instead of his leaving Christina on the deck, it was she who left him: and there he stood, between the high seas and the gathering shades of night, until both were black.

It was their last conversation of the kind.

One more night was spent at sea; the next, they were all back in Kensington. Here they were greeted with a pleasant surprise: Herbert was in the house to meet them. Cambridge seemed already to have done him good; he was singularly polite and subdued, though a little uncommunicative. They, however, had much to tell him, so this was not noticed immediately. His sisters supposed that he was in London for the night only, as he said he had come down

from Cambridge that day. It was not until later that they knew that he had been sent down. Erskine broke the news to them.

“I’m afraid,” he added, “that they’ve sent him down for good and all. The fact is, Ruth, your fears have been realised. He has done his best to fill another eye; and this time the proctor’s! He says he shall go back to Melbourne immediately.”

“Never!” cried Ruth; and she went straight to her brother, who was smoking viciously in another room.

“Yes, by ghost!” drawled Herbert through his hooked nose. “I’m going to clear out. I’m full up of England, Ruth, and I guess England’s full up of me. The best thing I can do is to go back, and turn boundary-rider or whim-driver. That’s about all I’m fit for, and it’s what I’m going to do. The *Ballaarat* sails on the 2nd—I’ve been to the office and taken my berth already. My oath, I drove

there straight from Liverpool Street this afternoon ! ”

Nor was there any moving him from his purpose, though Ruth tried for half an hour there and then. Twice that time Herbert spent afterwards in Tiny’s room ; but it was not known whether Tiny also had attempted to dissuade him. When he left her, the girl stood for five minutes with a foot on the fender and an elbow on the mantel-piece. Then she sought Ruth in haste.

Ruth had just gone up-stairs. Erskine was surprised to see her back in his study, almost immediately ; and startled by her mode of entrance, which suggested sudden illness in the house.

“ What in the world has happened ? ” he said, sitting upright in his chair.

“ Happened ? ” cried Ruth bitterly. “ It is the last straw ! I give her up. I wash my hands of her. I wish she had never come over ! ”

"Tiny? Why, what has she been doing now?"

"It isn't what she has been doing—it is what she says she's going to do. You may be able to bring her to reason, but I never shall. I won't try—I wash my hands of her. I will say no more to her. But it is simply disgraceful! She is far worse than Herbert!"

"Has she unmade her mind?" Holland asked, eagerly.

"No, no, no! But worse, I call it. Oh, Erskine, if you knew what she says—"

"I am waiting to hear."

"You'll never guess!"

"No, I give it up."

"So must Tiny—I never heard a madder idea in my life!"

"Than *what*, my dear?"

"Her going out with Herbert in the *Ballaarat*!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE THIRD TIME OF ASKING.

DECEMBER was at hand soon enough, and with the month came Lord Manister for his answer. Though more than slightly nervous, he entered the modest house in Kensington with his head very high; and certain inappropriate sensations visited him during the few minutes he was kept waiting in the drawing-room. He did not sit down. Then it was Tiny Luttrell who opened the door, and those sensations made good their escape from a bosom in which they had no business. In the living presence of the person one proposes to marry, there are some misgivings that had need be impossible—Christina little suspected her privilege of shutting the door on

Manister's with her own hand. He sat down at her example.

But if he was nervous, so was she, and as he came bravely to the point she found it more and more difficult to meet his hungry eyes. It was rather rare for Christina to experience any difficulty of the kind. She rose, and stood in front of the fire, with her back to the room and Lord Manister. There, with her forehead resting on the rim of the mantel-piece (for Tiny that was not far to bend), and while the hot fire scorched her plain gray skirt and gave a needed colour to the downcast face, she heard what Manister had to say. Soon she knew that he was saying it with his elbow on one end of the mantel-piece; and liked him for facing her so, and compelling her to face him. But when she found him waiting for his answer, she gave him it without lifting her eyes from the fire.

“No!”

He had asked her whether she had been able

to make up her mind. The answer she had given was, indeed, the truth ; but it had been prepared for a more conclusive question. She was vexed with him for the question he had chosen to put first ; and the more so because it had snatched from her an admission which she had not intended to make. But she had not made up her mind—that was the simple truth ; and now she trusted that he would make up his.

Instead of which, he said sadly, after a pause :

“ I wanted to give you six months ! ”

“ It was very wrong of you to give me one,” she answered, with startling ingratitude.

“ Why wrong ? ”

“ You might have seen that I was unworthy of you.”

“ I might have given up loving you, I suppose, in a second ! ”

“ I wish you would——”

“ I never shall ! ”

“ If you ever began,” Christina added to her

own sentence. At last her face was raised, and now it was his eyes that fell before the cool acumen of her smile.

“You don’t believe in me yet!” he groaned.
“Not yet, though I wait, wait, wait.”

“No one asked you to wait,” Lord Manister was reminded.

“But you see that I can’t help it! You see that I am miserable about you!”

This indeed was sufficiently plain: and the sight of his misery was softening Christina by degrees. She said more kindly:

“Listen to me, Lord Manister. It is a month since you saw me. At this moment you may feel what you are saying. Very well, then, you *do* feel it; but have you felt it throughout the last month? Have you felt so patient—you are far too patient—all the time? Has it never seemed to you that my keeping you in doubt, even for one month, was a piece of impertinence you ought never to have stood? Wouldn’t your

friends simply think you mad, if they knew how you were allowing me to use you? Haven't you yourself occasionally remembered who you are, and who I am, and burst out laughing? I must say I have; it sometimes seems to me so utterly absurd. . . . And you see, you can't answer my questions!"

He could not; one after another, they had penetrated to the quick.

"They are not fair questions," Manister said, doggedly. "What may have crossed my mind when I have felt worried and wretched has nothing to do with it. Isn't it enough that I tell you I can wait your own good time—that I feel a pride in waiting, now we are together and I am looking in your eyes?"

"No, I don't think that's quite enough," replied Christina, softly. "It would hardly be enough, you know, if you only felt me worth waiting for while you were with me. That would mean, that for some reason I fascinated

you. And fascination isn't love, Lord Manister. I don't want to be rude—much less unkind—but I can't believe that you have ever been really in love with me; I simply can't!"

Yet she had never felt so near to that belief before. Her words, however, helped Lord Manister back to his dignity.

"Of course you must believe only what you choose," said he, loftily. "One cannot force you to believe in one's sincerity. I suppose I spoilt you for believing in mine some time since. At all events you were fond of me once! Only a month ago you liked me all but well enough to marry me. Yet now you do not know!"

"Therefore the decision is left to you, Lord Manister; you must give me up."

"Never! while you are free."

His teeth were clenched.

"But do consider. Most probably I shall never care enough for you to marry you. And oh! I wonder how you can look at me, when

no other girl in the world would refuse you ! ”

“ Can’t you see that this is part of your charm ? ” cried the young man, impulsively. “ You are the one girl I know who is not worldly. You are the one girl I want ! ”

Christina shook her head.

“ If I have any charm at all, you oughtn’t to know what it is—you ought to love me you can’t say why—there’s no sizing-up real love ! ” she informed him rapidly, but with a smile. “ There’s another thing, too. You cannot be used to being treated as I have treated you in many ways. I have often been intensely rude to you. I can’t help thinking there must be a good deal of pique in your feeling towards me.”

“ There is more real love,” returned Manister, “ if I know it ! ”

“ I wonder if you do know it ? ” said the girl, with a laugh ; but she was wondering very

seriously in her heart. He protested no more ; she liked him for that, too, as also for the briskness in his tone and manner when he spoke next.

“ You say you don’t care for me enough ; and you say I don’t care for you properly ; and we won’t argue any more about either matter, for the moment.” He had flung back his head from the hand that had shaded his eyes ; his elbow remained on the chimney-piece, but now he was standing erect. “ There is something else,” said Lord Manister, “ that has prevented you from coming to a decision.”

“ There is certainly one thing that has had something to do with it.”

“ May I ask what it is ? ”

“ Certainly, Lord Manister. I am going back to Australia.”

“ Soon ? ” This was after a pause during which their eyes had not met.

“ Sooner than was intended.”

"Is it—is it for any special reason that—that you have kept from me?"

He was agitated by a sudden thought, which she read. She shook her head reassuringly.

"No, it is not to get married, nor yet engaged."

"Then there is no one out there!"

"There is no one anywhere that I could marry for love. That's the simple truth. I am going back to Australia because Herbert is going. Cambridge doesn't suit him, and I'm sorry to say he doesn't suit Cambridge. We came over together, so we are going back together. That, I promise you, is the whole and only explanation. I myself did not want to go so soon."

"But surely you are not going this year?"

"We are—before Christmas."

As Tiny spoke, her glance went to the window: she was very anxious to see the snow

before she sailed, but none had fallen yet, though December had come in dull and raw.

“But your people here must be very much against that?”

“They were, but now it is settled.”

“You must have promised to come back!”

Christina seemed surprised.

“Yes, I said I would come back some day.”

“And you shall!” cried Manister, passionately. “You shall come back as my wife! Do you suppose I am going to stop short at this, when but for your brother you would have been mine to-day? I don’t mean to say he has influenced you, except by going back so soon; you love Australia, and you must needs go back with him. Then go! I told you to take six months; you have taken one of them. When the other five are up, I am coming to you again, wherever you may be. Till then I will take no answer; and whatever it may be in the end, I bow to it—I bow to it!”

His passion surprised and even moved Christina; but his humility stirred up in her soul a contempt which mingled strangely with her pity. Women of spirit cannot admire the man who will submit to anything at their hands. Christina would willingly have given admiration in exchange for the love in which she was beginning to believe; it would have pleased her sense of justice, it would have promoted her self-respect, to make some such small payment on account. With Manister's patience she had none at all. She was disappointed in him. Her foot tapped angrily on the fender.

"But I don't want you to wait!" exclaimed Christina ungraciously. "I have told you so already."

"Still I mean to do so, and it serves me right."

This touched her generosity.

"Ah, don't say that!" she cried earnestly.

“O Lord Manister, I have forgotten all old scores—I never think of them now! The balance has been the other way so long; and I do not deserve another chance.”

“Ah but, Tiny—darling—it is I who am asking for that!”

His tone compelled her to meet his gaze—its intensity made her wince.

“You believe in me!” he cried joyously. “Say only that you believe in me, and I will go away now. I will go away happy and proud . . . to wait . . . for you.”

Then Tiny laid her little hand on his arm, and her eyes, that had filled with tears, answered him to his present satisfaction. He held her hand for just a few seconds before he went, and in kindness she returned his pressure. Then the shutting of the front-door down below made her realise that he was gone. And she had time to dry her eyes and to gather herself together before Ruth, whose hopes had been dead some days,

came into the room with a dejected mien and pointedly abstained from asking questions.

"If it interests you to hear it," Tiny said, lightly, "I am converted to your creed at last: I believe in Lord Manister!"

"But you are not engaged to him," Ruth said, wearily; "I see you are not."

"I am not; but he insists on waiting. If only he wasn't so tame! But I can't help believing in him now; and that settles it."

"Nothing is settled until you are engaged," said the matter-of-fact sister, with a sigh.

"Nevertheless I'm going to try with all my might to care for him, now that I see that he must really care for me. And let me tell you that I shall consider myself all the more bound to him because I haven't *said* yes, and because we're *not* actually engaged!"

"Yes?" said the other, incredulously
"That is so like you, Tiny!"

And Ruth almost sneered.

CHAPTER XIX.

COUNSEL'S OPINION.

THE worst of it all was this : that the young man himself had not invariably that confidence in his own affections which displayed itself so bravely and so convincingly at a psychological moment. Not that Manister was insincere, exactly. If you come to think of it, you may deceive others with perfect innocence, having once deceived yourself. And this was exactly what had happened.

There was one distinctive feature of the case : away from Christina Luttrell, the poor fellow had already had his doubts of himself ; in her presence those doubts were as certain to evaporate as snowflakes in the warmth of the sun.

Even as he went down Mrs. Holland's stairs,

Manister was joined by certain invisible companions—the misgivings that had made their escape as Christina entered the room. They had waited for him on the landing outside the door. They led and followed him down-stairs. They linked arms with him in the street. They stifled him in his hansom, which they boarded ruthlessly. In one of the silent rooms of the club to which he drove they talked to him silently, sitting on the arms of his saddle-back chair and arguing all at once. Powerless to shake them off, he was forced to bear with them, to hear what they had to say, to answer them where he could.

Mingling with the importunate voices of his inner consciousness were the remembered words of the girl. She had asked him whether he had never burst out laughing as the affair presented itself in certain lights; he did so now, silently, it is true, but with exceeding bitterness. She had told him that it was not enough that he should feel willing to wait for her when they were

together ; and now that he had left her, though so lately, he was certainly less inclined to be patient. She had suggested that he was more fascinated than in love ; and already he knew that her suggestion had given shape and utterance to a vague suspicion of his own soul. She had gone so far as to hint at the possible secret of his infatuation, and there, again, she had hit the mark ; though apart from her talent for torture, her sweet looks and charming ways had been strong wine to Manister from the first. Still her snubs had piqued his passion in the beginning of things out in Melbourne ; and here in Europe she had virtually refused him three times. Modest he might be, and yet know that this were a rare experience for such as himself at the hands of such as Tiny Luttrell. On the whole, the experience was sufficiently complete as it stood : yet he could not help wishing to win ; indeed, he had gone too far to draw back, and for that reason alone the idea of defeat in the

end was intolerable to him. And this was the one spring of his actions which seemed to have escaped Christina's notice; the others she had detected with an acuteness which made him wonder, for the first time, whether on her very merits she would be a comfortable person to live with after all.

Gradually, however, these echoes of the late interview grew fainter in his ears, and its upshot came home to Manister with sensations of chagrin sharper than any he had endured in all his life before. His feelings when refused by this girl in the previous August, and under peculiarly humiliating circumstances, were enviable compared with his feelings now. Then he had deserved his humiliation—at least he was generous enough to say so—and he had taken what he called his punishment in a very manly spirit. But the desire to win had sent him on a secret mission to Cintra, on the chance of seeing her there, and his present feelings reminded him

of those with which he had beaten his retreat from Portugal. For he had gone there for a final answer, and had come back without one; and to-day he had suffered afresh that selfsame humiliation, only in an aggravated form, and more voluntarily than ever. She had never asked him to wait; he had offered on both occasions to wait six months, nay, he had insisted on waiting. Even now, within a couple of hours after the event, he could scarcely credit his own weakness and stultification. He was by no means so weak in affairs wherein the affections played no part. He firmly believed that no other woman could have twisted him round her finger as this one had done. But here, perhaps, we have merely the every-day spectacle of a young man discerning exceptional excuses for a realised infirmity; and the point is, that Manister realised his weakness this evening as he had never done before. The girl herself had made him look inward. She had suggested, fascination not love. That

suggestion stuck painfully. Yet he was not sure.

Never had he felt so horribly unsure of himself; but in the midst of his self-distrust there came to him, suddenly, the recollection that she distrusted him no longer; and there was actually some comfort in this thought, which is strange when you note its fellows, but due less to the contradictoriness of human nature than to the supremacy of a young man's vanity. He stood well with her now. She believed in him at last. Propped up by these reflections, he began almost to believe in himself. At least a momentary complacency was the result.

The improvement in his spirits allowed Lord Manister to give heed to another portion of his organism, which had for some time been inviting him to go into another room and dine. Now he did so, with a sharp eye for acquaintances, whom he had no desire to meet. For this reason he had driven to the club which he had joined

most recently ; it was not a young man's club, so he felt fairly safe from his friends. Yet he had hardly ordered his soup, and was searching the wine-list for the choice brand which the circumstances seemed to demand, when a heavy hand dropped upon his shoulder, and his glance leapt from the wine-list to the last face he expected or wished to see—that of his kinsman Captain Dromard.

Captain Dromard was a cousin of the present Earl, and notoriously the rolling stone of his house. Manister had seen him last in Melbourne, and ever since had borne him a grudge which he was not likely to forget. Had he dreamt that the Captain (who had been last heard of in Borneo) was in London, Manister would have shunned this club in order to avoid the risk of meeting him; but it seemed that Captain Dromard had landed in England only that morning : and they dined together, of course ; and Manister made the best of it. His kinsman was a big,

grizzled, florid man, with an imperial, and with a comic wicked cut about him which made one laugh. But he retained an unpleasant trick of treating Manister as a mere boy: for instance, he was in time to choose the brand, and, as he said before the waiter, to prevent Manister from poisoning himself. He was, however, an entertaining person, and at his best to-night, being wont to delight in London for a day or two before realising the infernal qualities of the climate and arranging fresh travels. But Manister was not entertained; he tried to appear so, but the Captain saw through the pretence, and immediately scented a woman. There were reasons why the rolling stone was particularly good at detecting this element—which always interested him. His interest was unusual in the present instance, owing to certain reminiscences of Manister in Melbourne, during his own flying visit to that port. It was during a subsequent few days in England that Captain Dromard had

alarmed the Countess, with a result of which he was as yet unaware ; but he did not hesitate to make inquiries now, and he began by asking Manister how he had managed to get out of the scrape in which he had left him.

“I remember no scrape,” said Manister stiffly.

“You don’t? Well, perhaps I put it too strongly,” conceded the Captain. “We’ll say no more about it, my boy. Devilish pretty little thing, though; remember her well, but could never recall her name. By the bye, I’m afraid I terrified your mother over that. . Feared she was going to cable you home next day. Was sorry I spoke.”

“So was I,” Manister said, dryly, but, by an effort, not forbiddingly, so that the Captain saw no harm in raising his glass.

“Well, here’s to the lady’s health, my boy, whoever she was and wherever she may be!”

Manister smiled across his glass and drained

it in silence. There was a glitter in his young eyes which made it difficult for the Captain to drop the subject finally. Manister had been drinking freely, without becoming flushed, which is another sign of trouble. The Captain could not help saying confidentially :

“ You know, Harry, your mother was so keen for you to marry one of old Acklam’s daughters. That’s what frightened her. But it is to come off some day, isn’t it ? ”

“ Can’t say,” said Lord Manister.

“ It ought to, Harry. I like to see a young fellow with your position marry properly, and settle down. I don’t know which of the Garths it is, but I’ve always heard one of ’em was the girl you liked.”

“ Suppose the girl you like won’t marry you ? ” Manister exclaimed, with a sudden change of manner, and in the tone of one consulting an authority.

“ Well, there’s an end on’t.”

“ Ah, but suppose she can’t make up her mind? ”

“ You might give her a month—though *I* wouldn’t.”

“ Suppose a month is not enough for her? ”

The Captain stared; his bronzed forehead became barred with furrows; his eyes turned stony with indignation.

“ A month not enough for her to make up her mind—about you? ” he said at length, incredulously. “ Good God, sir, see her to the devil! ”

Then Lord Manister showed his teeth. Though he had consulted the Captain, he took his advice badly. He said, you could not be much in love to be choked off so easily; he hinted that his kinsman had never been much in love. Captain Dromard intimated in reply that whether that was the case or not, he was not without experience of a sort, and he could tell Harry that no woman under heaven was

worth kneeling in the mud to, which, Harry said hotly, was unnecessary information. So they went elsewhere to smoke, and later on to a music-hall, the subject having been left for good in the club coffee-room. The following afternoon, however, Lord Manister drove through the snow with a very resolute front to show to Tiny Luttrell, who was just then passing Deal in the *Ballaarat*, without having given him the faintest notion yesterday that she was to sail to-day.

CHAPTER XX.

IN HONOUR BOUND.

ABOARD the *Ballaarat* Christina committed a new eccentricity, but, it may be well to state at once, a perfectly harmless one. She confided in another girl—a practice which Tiny had avoided all her life. And this very girl had offended her at first sight by looking aggressively happy when the boat sailed and all nice women were in tears.

There had been a time when Christina seldom cried, but in England she had grown very soft in some ways, and she looked her last at it, and at the snow that had fallen in the night as if to please her, through blinding tears. She had never in her life felt more acutely wretched than when saying good-bye to Ruth and Erskine, and her sorrow was heightened by the

feeling that she had been both unkind and ungrateful to Ruth, to whom she clung for forgiveness at the last moment. The reason why her parting words were jocular, though broken, was because the sight of an honest smiling face, which might have blushed for smiling then, sent a fleam of irritation through her heart that awoke the latent mischief in her wet eyes.

“I do wish you would ask Erskine to throw a snow-ball at that depressing person,” she whispered to Ruth, “who does nothing but laugh and look really happy! If it was only put on, for the sake of her friends, I could forgive her; but it isn’t. Tell him I mean it—there’s no fun in me to-day; and you may also tell him that it would have been only brotherly of him to kiss me, on this occasion, when we may all be going to the bottom!”

Erskine, who had crossed the gangway before his wife, so that she need not feel that

he overheard her final words to her own kin, shook his head at Tiny when Ruth joined him on the quay. But his smile was lifeless ; there was no fun in him either, to-day. He drew his wife's arm through his own, and Tiny saw the last of them standing together thus. They stood in snow and mud, but the railway-shed behind them was a great sheet of unsullied whiteness, softly edging the bright December sky, and Christina never forgot her first glimpse of the snow and her last of Ruth and Erskine. When their figures were gone, and only the snow was left for Christina's eyes, they filled afresh, and she broke hastily from Herbert, who was himself uncommonly dejected. She hurried unsteadily to her cabin, to find her cabin-companion singing softly to herself as she unstrapped her rugs ; for her cabin-companion was, of course, the odiously cheerful person who already on deck had done violence to Christina's feelings.

Thus the acquaintance began in a particularly unpromising manner; but the cheerful person turned out to be as bad a sailor as Christina was a good one, and she met with much practical kindness at Christina's hands, which had a clever tender way with them, though in other respects the good sailor was not from the first so sympathetic. It is harder than it ought to be to sympathise with the seasick when one is quite well oneself; still Christina found it impossible not to admire her extraordinary companion, who kept up her spirits during a whole week spent in her berth, and was more cheerful than ever at the end of it, when she could scarcely stand. Then Christina expressed her admiration, likewise her curiosity, and received a simple explanation. The cheerful person was on her way to Colombo and the altar-rails. Her *trousseau* was in the hold.

The two became exceeding fast friends, and their friendship was founded on mutual envy.

Tiny was envied for the various qualities which made her greatly admired on board, for that admiration itself, and for the marked manner in which she paid no heed to it; and she envied her friend a very ordinary love-story, now approaching a very ordinary end. The cheerful girl was plain, unaccomplished, and not at all young. But there was one whom she loved better than herself: she was properly engaged: she was happy in her engagement: her soul was settled and at peace. Also, she was good, and Christina envied her far more than she envied Christina: who would listen wistfully to the commonplace expression of a commonplace happiness, but was herself much more reserved. It was only when the other girl guessed it that she admitted that she also was "as good as engaged." The other girl clamoured to know all about it; and ultimately, in the Indian Ocean, she discovered that Christina was not the least in love with the man to whom she was as good as

engaged. Then this honest person spoke her mind with extreme freedom, and Christina, instead of being offended, opened her own heart as freely, merely keeping to herself the man's name and never hinting at his high degree. She declared that she was morally bound to him, adding that she had treated him badly enough already; her friend ridiculed the bond, and told her how she would be treating him worse than ever. Christina argued—it was curious how fond she was of arguing the matter, and how she allowed herself to be lectured by a stranger. But these two were not strangers now; the cheerful girl was the best friend Tiny had ever made among women. They parted with a wrench at Colombo, where Tiny saw the other safely into the arms of a gentleman of a suitably happy and ordinary appearance; and so one more friend passed in and out of the young girl's life, leaving a deeper mark in the three weeks than either of them suspected.

The rest of the voyage dragged terribly with Christina, which is an unusual experience for the prettiest girl aboard an Australian liner; only on this voyage the prettiest girl was also the most unsociable. Beyond her late companion (whose berth remained empty, to depress Christina whenever she entered the cabin) Miss Luttrell had formed few acquaintances and no friendships between London and Colombo; between Colombo and Melbourne she simply preyed upon herself. Herbert remonstrated with her, and the third officer—who had been fourth on the boat in which they had come over—was excessively interested, remembering the difference six months earlier. Then, indeed, Christina had found a good deal to say to all the officers, including the captain, whom she had chaffed notoriously; but now she would stay out late and alone on the starlit deck, without ever breaking the rules by conversing with the officer of the watch (her pet trick formerly), and only the third, who knew her of old,

had the right to bid her good-day. Tiny's cheerful friend had left her wretched and apprehensive. She saw the Southern Cross rise out of the southern sea without a thrill of welcome, but rather with a vague dismay; from the after-rail she said good-bye to the Great Bear with a shudder at the thought of seeing it again. Neither end of the earth presented a very peaceful prospect to Christina as she hovered between the two on the steamer's deck. She had quite made up her mind to return to England, however, and to reward Lord Manister's long-suffering docility by marrying him at the end of the six months. Meanwhile she would enjoy Australia, and tell only one of her friends there. One she must tell, and with her own lips, in case she should be misjudged. And thinking not a little of her own justification, she invented a small sophistry with which to defend herself as occasion might arise. She argued that two men were in love with her,

that she herself was in love with neither, but that she liked one of them too well to marry him without love. Therefore, she said, the easiest way out of it was to marry the other, who not only had less in him to satisfy, but who had more to give in place of real happiness. She was proud of this argument. She was sorry it had not occurred to her before stopping at Colombo—forgetting that she had told her friend of only one man who was in love with her. But the heart starves on sophistry with nothing to it: and with Christina the voyage dragged cruelly to its end.

But the moment she landed in Melbourne a good thing happened to her—she was snatched out of herself. A common shock and anxiety awaited both Christina and Herbert Luttrell: they found their mother in tears over a piece of very bad news from Wallandoon. It seemed that Mr. Luttrell had gone up to the station the week before, to choose the site for a well

which he was about to sink at considerable expense ; and that he was now lying at the old homestead with a broken leg, the result of a buggy accident with a pair of young horses. He was able to write with his own hand, in pencil, and he mentioned that Swift had fetched a surgeon from the river in the quickest time ever known ; that the surgeon had set the leg quite successfully, so that there was no occasion for anxiety, though naturally he should be unable to leave Wallandoon for some weeks. He expressed forcibly the hope that his wife would not think of joining him there ; she was not strong enough, and he needed no attention. Nevertheless, had the *Ballaarat* arrived one day later, Mrs. Luttrell would have gone. Her two children were in time to restrain her, but only by undertaking to go instead. Before they could realise that they had spent an afternoon and a night in Melbourne, they had left the city and had embarked on

an inland voyage of five hundred miles up-country.

So their first full day ashore was spent in a railway-carriage ; but all that night the stars were in their eyes, and the gum-trees racing by on either hand and the warm wind fanning their faces, because Tiny would never travel inside the coach. They were back in Riverina. The Murray coiled behind them ; the Murrumbidgee lay before. And the night after that they were creeping across the desert of the One Tree Plain, with the Lachlan lying ahead and the Murrumbidgee left behind. Here the leather-hung coach laboured in the mud, for the Lachlan district was suffering before it could profit from a rather heavy rainfall three days old ; and the driver flogged seven horses all night long, instead of mildly chastening five ; and the girl at his side could not have slept if she had tried, but she did not try. To her the night seemed too good to miss. The stars shone brilliantly from rim to

rim of the unbroken plain, and upward from the overflowing crab-holes, and even in the flooded ruts, where the coach-wheels split and scattered them like quicksilver beneath the thumb. There was no conversation on the coach. On the eve of facing his father, Herbert was rehearsing his defence ; while Tiny was just revelling in the night, and feeling very happy, so she said.

For a couple of hours before dawn they rested at Booligal. But Booligal is notorious for its mosquitoes, and there had been three inches of rain there, so the rest was a mockery. Tiny had a bed to lie down on, but she did not lie long. She was found by Herbert (who smoked six pipes in those two hours) leaning against one of the verandah-posts, as if asleep on her feet, but with eyes fixed intently upon a dull reddening arc on the very edge of the darkling plain.

“By the time we get there,” said Herbert, severely, “you’ll be just about dished ! What

on earth are you doing out here, instead of taking a spell when you can get it?"

"I'm watching for the sun," murmured Christina, without moving. "It's a regular Australian dawn; you never saw one like it in England. Here the sun gets up in the middle of the night, and there he very often doesn't get up at all. Oh, but it's glorious to be back—don't *you* think so, old Herbs?"

"I might—if it wasn't for the governor."

Tiny flushed with shame. She had forgotten the accident. Being reminded of it, she turned her back on the sunrise, in deep contrition; but she had not taken Herbert's meaning.

"I funk facing him," said he gloomily. "I have nothing to say for myself; and if I had, a fellow couldn't say it, with the poor governor lying on his back."

"Poor old Herbs!" said Tiny, kindly. "I don't think you have much to fear, however. It was our mistake in wanting you to go to

Cambridge, when you'd been your own boss always. You were born for the bush—I'm not sure that we both weren't!"

He did not hear her sigh.

"It's all very well for you to talk, Tiny! You haven't to make your peace with anybody—you haven't to confess that you've made a ghastly fool of yourself!"

"Have I not?" exclaimed the girl, bitterly.

"I thought you weren't going to mention his name?" Herbert said in surprise.

"No more I am," replied Tiny, recovering herself. "So, as you say, it is all very well for me to talk." And as she turned, a ball of fire was balanced on the distant rim of the plain, and the arc above was now a semicircle of crimson, which blended even yet with the lingering shades of night.

Even Herbert was not in all Tiny's secrets. He never dreamt that she had before her an ordeal far worse than his own. When they sighted the

little township where the station buggy always met the coach, he thought her excitement due to obvious and natural causes. The township roofs gleamed in the afternoon sun for half an hour before one could distinguish even a looked-for object, such as a buggy drawn up in the shade of the hotel verandah. Herbert had time to become excited himself, in spite of the ignoble circumstances of his return.

"I see it!" he exclaimed with confidence, at five hundred yards. "And good old Bushman and Brownlock are the pair. I'd spot 'em a mile off."

"Can you see who it is in the buggy?" asked Tiny, at two hundred. She was sitting like a mouse, between Herbert and the driver.

"I shall in a shake; I think it's Jack Swift."

He did not know how her heart was beating. At fifty yards he said, "It isn't Swift; it's one of the hands. I've never seen this joker before."

"Ah!" said Tiny, and that was all. Herbert had no ear for a tone.

CHAPTER XXI.

A DEAF EAR.

THE manager of Wallandoon was harder at work that afternoon than any man on the run. This was generally the case when there was hard work to be done ; when there was not, however, Swift had a way of making work for himself. He had made his work to-day. Nothing need have prevented his meeting the coach himself ; but it had occurred to Swift that he would be somewhat in the way at the meeting between Mr. Luttrell and his children ; while with regard to his own meeting with Christina he felt much nervousness, which night, perhaps, would partly cloak. This, however, was an instinct rather than a motive. Instinctively also he sought by violent labour to expel the fever from his mind.

He was absurdly excited, and his energy during the heat of the day was little less than insane. So at any rate it seemed to the youth who was helping him, by looking on, while Swift covered in half a tank with brushwood. The tank had been almost dry, but was newly filled by the rains, and the partial covering was designed to delay evaporation. But Swift himself would execute his own design, and thought nothing of standing up to his chest in the water, clothed only in his wideawake, though he was the manager of the station. The young store-keeper did not admire him for it, though he could not help envying the manager his thick arms, which were also bronzed, like the manager's face and neck, and in striking contrast to the whiteness of his deep chest and broad shoulders. There had been a change in store-keepers during recent months, a change not by any means for the better.

Near the tank were some brushwood yards, which were certainly in need of repairs, but the

need was far from immediate. Swift, however, chose to mend up the fences that night, while he happened to be on the spot, and his young assistant had no choice but to watch him. It was dark when at last they rode back together to the station, silent, hungry, and not pleased with one another; for Swift was one of those energetic people whom it is difficult to help unless you are energetic yourself, and the new storekeeper was not. This youth did little for his rations that day until the homestead was reached. Then the manager left him to unsaddle and feed both horses, and himself walked over to the verandah, whence came the sound of voices.

Mr. Luttrell was lying in the long deck-chair which had been procured from a neighbouring station, and Herbert was smoking demurely at his side. Christina was not there at all.

“You will find her in the dining-room,” Mr. Luttrell said, as his son and the manager shook hands. “She has gone to make tea for you ;

she means to look after us all for the next few weeks."

The dining-room was at the back of the house, and as Swift walked round to it he stepped from the verandah into the heavy sand in which the homestead was planted. He could not help it. His love had grown upon him since that short week with her nine months before. He felt that if his eyes rested upon her first, he could take her hand more steadily. So he stood and watched her a moment, as she bent over the tea-table with lowered head and busy fingers, and there was something so like his dreams in the sight of her there that he almost cried out aloud. Next instant his spurs jingled in the verandah. She raised her head with a jerk; he saw the fear of himself in her eyes—and knew.

It did not blind him to her haggard looks.

When they had shaken hands he could not help saying, "It is evident that the Old Country doesn't agree with you, as you feared." And

when it was too late he would have altered the remark.

“Seeing that it’s six weeks since I left it, and that I have been travelling night and day since I landed, you are rather hard on the Old Country.”

So she answered him, her fingers in the tea-caddy and her eyes with them. The lamplight shone upon her freckles as Swift studied her anxiously. Perhaps, as she hinted, she was only tired.

“I say, I can’t have you making tea for me!” Swift exclaimed nervously. “You are worn out, and I am accustomed to doing all this sort of thing for myself.”

“Then you will have the kindness to unaccustom yourself! I am mistress here until papa is fit to be moved.”

And not a day longer. He knew it by the way she avoided his eyes. Yet he was forced to make conversation.

“ Why do you warm the tea-pot ? ”

“ It is the proper thing to do.”

“ I never knew that ! ”

“ I daresay it isn’t the only thing you never knew. I shouldn’t wonder if you swallowed your coffee with cold milk ? ”

“ Of course we do—when we have coffee.”

“ Ah, it is good for you to have a house-keeper for a time,” said Christina cruelly, she did not know why.

“ It’s my firm belief,” remarked Swift, “ that you have learnt these dodges in England, and that you did *not* detest the whole thing ! ”

The words had a far-away familiar sound to Christina, and they were spoken in the pointed accents with which one quotes.

“ Did I say I should detest the whole thing ? ” asked Christina, marking the table-cloth with a fork.

“ You did ; they were your very words.”

“ Come, I don’t believe that.”

“I can’t help it; those were your words. They were your very last words to me.”

“And you actually remember them!”

She looked at him, smiling; but his face put out her smile, and the wave of compassion which now swept over hers confirmed the knowledge that had come to him with her first frightened glance.

The storekeeper, who came in before more was said, was the unconscious witness of a well-acted interlude of which he was also the cause. He approved of Miss Luttrell at the tea-tray, and was to some extent recompensed for the hard day’s work he had not done. He left her with Swift on the back verandah, and they might have been grateful to him, for not only had his advent been a boon to them both at a very awkward moment, but in going he supplied them with a topic.

“What has happened to my little Englishman?” Christina asked at once. “I hoped to find him here still.”

"I wish you had. He was a fine fellow, and this one is not."

"Then you didn't mean to get rid of my little friend?"

"No. It's a very pretty story," Swift said slowly, as he watched her in the starlight. "His father died, and he went home and came in for something; and now that little chap is actually married to the girl he used to talk about!"

Tiny was silent for some moments. Then she laughed.

"So much for my advice! His case is the exception that proves my rule."

"I happen to remember your advice. So you still think the same?"

"Most certainly I do."

He laughed sardonically. "You might just as well tell me outright that you are engaged to be married."

The girl recoiled.

“How do you know?” she cried. “Who has told you?”

“You have—now. Your eyes told me twenty minutes ago.”

“But it isn’t true! Nobody knows anything about it! It isn’t a real engagement yet!”

“I have no doubt it will be real enough for me,” answered Swift very bitterly; and he moved away from her, though her little hands were stretched out to keep him.

“Don’t leave me!” she cried piteously. “I want to tell you. I will tell you now, if you will only let me.”

He faced about, with one foot on the verandah and the other in the sand.

“Tell me,” he said, “if it is that old affair come right; that is all I care to know.”

“It is; but it hasn’t come right yet—perhaps it never will. If only you would let me tell you everything!”

“Thank you; I daresay I can imagine how

matters stand. I think I told you it would all come right. I am very glad it has."

"Jack!"

But Jack was gone. In the starlight she watched him disappear among the pines. He walked so slowly that she fancied him whistling, and would have given very much for some such sign of outward indifference to show that he cared; but no sound came to her save the chirrup of the crickets, which never ceased in the night-time at Wallandoon. And that made her listen for the champing of the solitary animal in the horse-yard, until she heard it, too, and stood still to listen to both noises of the night. She remembered how once or twice in England she had seemed to hear these two sounds, and how she had longed to be back again in the old verandah. Now she was back. This was the old, old verandah. And those two old sounds were beating into her brain in very reality . . . without pause or pity.

“Why, Tiny,” said Herbert, later, “this is the second time to-day! I believe you *can* sleep on end, like a blooming native-companion. You’re to come and talk to the governor; he would like you to sit with him before we carry him into his room.”

“Would he?” Tiny cried out: and a moment later she was kneeling by the deck-chair, and sobbing wildly on her father’s breast.

“Just because I told her she’d dish herself,” remarked Herbert, looking on with irritation, “she’s been and gone and done it. That’s still her line!”

CHAPTER XXII.

SUMMUM BONUM.

FOR a month Christina declined to leave her father's side, much against his will, but the girl's will was stronger. She was as though tethered to the long deck-chair until the lame man became able to leave it, on two sticks. Then she flew to the other extreme.

North of the Lachlan the recent rains had been less heavy than in Lower Riverina. On Wallandoon less than two inches had fallen, and by February it was found necessary to resume work at the eight-mile whim. But the whim-driver had gone off with his cheque when the rain gave him a holiday, and he had never returned. There was a momentary difficulty in finding a man to replace him; and it was then

that Miss Tiny startled the station by herself volunteering for the post. At first Mr. Luttrell would not hear of the plan ; but the manager's opinion was not asked, and he carefully refrained from giving it ; while Herbert (who was about to be entrusted with a mob of wethers for the Melbourne market) took his sister's side. He pointed out, with truth, that any fool could drive a whim under ordinary circumstances, and that, as Tiny would hardly petition to sleep at the whim, the long ride morning and evening would do her no harm. Mr. Luttrell gave in then. He had tried in vain to drive the young girl from his side. She had watched over him with increasing solicitude, with an almost unnatural tenderness. She had shown him a warmer heart than heretofore he had known her to possess, and an amount of love and affection which he felt to be more than a father's share. He did not know what was the matter, but he made guesses. It had been his lifelong practice not to "interfere" with

his children ; hence the earliest misdeeds of his daughter Tiny ; hence, also, the academic career of his son Herbert. Mr. Luttrell put no questions to the girl, and none concerning her to her brother, which was nice of him, seeing that her ways had made him privately inquisitive ; but he took Herbert's advice, and let Christina drive the eight-mile whim.

The experiment proved a complete success ; but then plain whim-driving is not difficult. Christina spent an hour or so, two or three times a day, in driving the whim-horse round and round until the tank was full, after which it was no trouble to keep the troughs properly supplied. The rest of her time she occupied in reading or musing in the shadow of the tank ; but each day she boiled her " billy " in the hut, eating very heartily in her seclusion, and delighting more and more in the temporary freedom of her existence, as a boy in holidays that are drawing to an end. The whim stood high on a plain, the wind

whistled through its timbers, and each evening the girl brought back to the homestead a higher colour and a lighter step. In these days, however, very little was seen of her. She would come in tired, and soon secrete herself within four newspapered walls ; and she went out of her way to discourage visitors at the whim. Of this she made such a point that the manager, on coming in earlier than usual one afternoon, was surprised when Herbert, whom he met riding out from the station, informed him that he was on his way to the eight-mile to look up the whim-driver. Herbert seemed to have something on his mind, and presently he told Swift what it was. He had awkward news for Tiny, which he had decided to tell her at once and be done with it. But he did not like the job. He liked it so little that he went the length of confiding in Swift as to the nature of the news. The manager annoyed him—he had not a remark to make.

Herbert rode moodily on his way. He was

sorry that he had spoken to Swift (whose stolid demeanour was a surprise to him, as well as an irritation); he had undoubtedly spoken too freely. With Swift still in his thoughts, Luttrell was within a mile of the whim and cantering gently before he became aware that another rider was overtaking him at a gallop; and as he turned in his saddle, the manager himself bore down upon him with a strange look in his good eyes.

"I want you to let me—tell Tiny!" Jack Swift said hoarsely, as Herbert stared. Jack's was a look of pure appeal.

"You?"

"Yes. . . . You understand?"

"That's all right! I thought I couldn't have been mistaken," said Herbert, still looking him in the eyes. "By ghost, Jack, you're a sportsman!"

He held out his hand, and Swift gripped it. In another minute they were a quarter of a mile apart; but it was Swift who was riding on to

the whim, very slowly now, and with his eyes on the black timbers rising clear of the sand against the sky. He could never look at them without hearing words and tones that it was still bitter to remember ; and now he was going—to break bad news to Tiny ? That was his undertaking.

He found the whim-driver with her book in the shadow of the tank.

“Good-afternoon,” Christina said, very civilly, though her eyebrows had arched at the sight of him. “Have you come to see whether the troughs are full, or am I wanted at the homestead ? ”

“Neither,” said Swift, smiling ; “only the mail is in, and there are letters from England.”

“How good of you ! ” exclaimed the girl, holding out her hand.

Swift was embarrassed.

“Now you will pitch into me ! I haven’t seen the letters, and I don’t know whether there

is one for you ; but I met Herbert, and he told me he had heard from your sister ; and—and I thought you might like to hear that, as I was coming this way.”

“It is still good of you,” said Christina, kindly ; and that made him honest.

“It isn’t a bit good, because I came this way to speak to you about something else.”

“Really ? ”

“Yes, because one sees so little of you now, and soon you will be going. The truth is, something has been rankling with me ever since the night you arrived—nothing you said to me ; it was my own behaviour to you——”

“Which wasn’t pretty,” interrupted Tiny.

“I know it wasn’t ; I have been very sorry for it. When you offered to tell me about your engagement, I wouldn’t listen. I would listen now !”

“And now I shouldn’t dream of telling you a word,” Tiny said, staring coolly in his face ; “not even if I *were* engaged.”

“Well, it amounts to that,” Swift told her steadfastly, for he knew what he meant to say, and was not to be deterred by the snubs and worse to which he was knowingly laying himself open.

“Pray how do you know what it amounts to?”

“On your side, at any rate, it amounts to an engagement; for you consider yourself bound.”

“Upon my word!” cried Tiny, nastily. “Do you mind telling me how you come to know so much about my affairs?”

“I am naturally interested in them after all these years.”

“How very kind of you! How interested you were when I foolishly offered to tell you myself! So you have been talking me over with Herbert, have you?”

“We have spoken about you to-day for the first time; that is why I’m here.”

Christina was white with anger.

“And I suppose,” she sneered, “that you have told him things which I have forgotten, and which you might have forgotten as well!”

“I don’t think you do suppose that,” Swift said, gently. “No, he merely told me about your engagement.”

“Then why do you want me to tell you?”

“Because you alone can tell me what I most want to know.”

“Oh, indeed.”

“Yes—whether you are happy!”

She had found her temper, which enabled her to put a keener edge on the words, “That, I should say, is not your business;” and she stared at Swift coldly where he stood, with his hands behind him, looking down upon her without wincing.

“I am not so sure,” said he, sturdily. “I loved you dearly; *I* could have made you happy!”

“It is well you think so,” was the best

answer she could think of for that; and she did not think of it at once. "Do you know who he is?" she added later.

"Herbert told me. It seems you have tampered with a splendid chance."

"I have tampered with three. I shall jump at the next—if I get another."

"And if you don't?"

Involuntarily she drew a deep breath at the thought. Her head was lifted, and her blue eyes wandered over the yellow distance of the plains with the look of a prisoner coming back into the world.

"Nobody could blame him," she said at last, "and I should be rightly served."

Swift crouched in front of her, almost sitting on his heels to peer into her face.

"Tiny," he suddenly cried, "you don't love him one bit!"

"But I think he loves me," she answered, hanging her head, for he held her hand.

“Not as I do, Tiny! Never as I have done! I have loved you all the time, and never anyone but you. And you—you care for me best; I see it in your eyes; I feel it in your hand. Don’t you think that you, too, may have loved me all the time?”

“If I have,” she murmured, “it has been without knowing it!”

It was without knowing it that she trod upon the truth. Their voices were trembling.

“Darling,” he whispered, “this would be home to you. It’s the same old Wallandoon. You love it, I know; and I think—you love——”

She snatched her hand from his, and sprang to her feet. He, too, rose astounded, gazing on every side to see who was coming. But the plain was flecked only with straggling sheep, bleating to the troughs. His gaze came back to the girl. Her straw hat sharply shadowed her face like a highwayman’s mask, her blue eyes flashing in the midst of it, and her lips below parted in passion.

“ You ? I hate you ! I *do* consider myself bound, and you would make me false—you would tempt me through my love for the bush, for this place—you coward ! ”

Swift reddened, and there was roughness in his answer :

“ I can’t stand this, even from you. I have heard that all women are unfair; you are, certainly. What you say about my tempting you is nonsense. You have shown me that you love me, and that you don’t love the other man; you know you have. You have now to show whether you have the courage of your love—to give him up—to marry me.”

This method must have had its attractions after another’s; but it hurt because Tiny was sensitive with all her sins.

“ You have spoken very cruelly,” she faltered, delightfully forgetting how she had spoken herself. “ I could not marry anyone who spoke to me like that ! ”

“Oh, forgive me!” he cried, covered with contrition in an instant. “I am a rough brute, but I promise——” He stopped, for her head had drooped, and she seemed to be crying. He stood away from her in his shame. “Yes, I am a rough brute,” he repeated bitterly; “but, darling, you don’t know how it roughens one, bossing the men!”

Still she hung her head, but within the widened shadow of her hat he saw her red mouth twitching at his clumsiness. Yet, when she raised her face, her smile astonished him, it was so timorous; and the wondrous shyness in her lovely eyes abashed him far more than her tears.

“I daresay—I need that!” he heard her whisper, in spurts. “I think I should like—you—to boss—me—too.”

.
These things and others were tersely told in a letter written in the hot blast of a north wind at Wallandoon, and delivered in London six

weeks later, damp with the rain of early April. The letter arrived by the last post, and Ruth read it on the sofa in her husband's den, while Erskine paced up and down the room, listening to the sentences she read aloud, but saying little.

"So, you see," said Ruth, as she put the thin sheets together and replaced them in their envelope, "she accepted him before she knew of Lord Manister's engagement. *He* knew of it, and had undertaken to tell her, but that was only to give himself a last chance. Had she heard of it first, he would never have spoken again."

"I question that," Erskine said, thoughtfully. "He might not have spoken so soon; but his love would have proved stronger than his pride, in the end. Yet I like him for his pride. That was what she needed, and what Manister lacked. It is very curious."

"I wonder if you really would like him," said Ruth, who no longer cared for the sound of

Lord Manister's name. "I don't remember much about him, except that we all thought a good deal of him; but somehow I don't fancy he's your sort."

"I wasn't aware that I had a 'sort,'" Erskine said, smiling.

"Oh, but you have. *I* am not your sort. But Tiny was!"

He laughed heartily.

"Then we four have chosen sides most excellently! It is quite fatal to marry your own sort. Didn't you know that, my dear?"

"No, I didn't," said Ruth, watching him from the sofa; "but I am very glad to hear it, and I quite agree. You and Tiny, for instance, would have jeered at everything in life until you were left jeering at one another. Don't you think so?" she added wistfully, after a pause.

"I think you're an uncommonly shrewd little person," Erskine remarked, smiling down upon her kindly, so that her face shone with pleasure.

“Do you?” she said, as he helped her to rise. “You used to think me so dense when Tiny was here; and I daresay I was—beside Tiny.”

“My dearest girl,” said Erskine, taking his wife in his arms, and speaking in a troubled tone, “you have never said that sort of thing before, and I hope you never will again. Tiny was Tiny—our Tiny—but surely wisdom was not her strongest point? She amused us all because she wasn’t quite like other people; but how often am I to tell you that I am thankful you are not like ‘Tiny?’”

“Ah, if you really were!” Ruth whispered on his shoulder.

“But I always was,” he answered, kissing her: and they smiled at one another until the door was shut, and Ruth had gone: for there was now between them an exceeding tenderness.

Ruth had left him her letter, so that he might read it for himself; but though he lit a pipe and sat down, it was some time before Erskine

read anything. Had Ruth returned and asked him for his thoughts, he would have confessed that he was wondering whether Tiny's husband would understand the girl he had managed to tame : and whether he had a fine ear for a joke. As wondering would not tell him, he at length turned to the letter ; and that did not tell him either ; but before he turned the first of the many leaves, it was as though the child herself was beside him in the room.

The qualities she mentioned in her beloved were all of a serious character, and the praises she bestowed upon him, at her own expense, were a little tiresome to one who did not know the man. Erskine turned over with excusable impatience, and was rewarded on the next page by a sufficiently just summary of Lord Manister ; even here, however, Tiny took occasion to be very hard on herself. She declared (possibly she would have said it in any case, but it happened to be true) that she had never loved Lord Manister.

On the way she had ill-used him she harped no more; his own solution of his difficulties had, indeed, broken that string. But she spoke of her "temptation" (incidentally remarking that the hall windows haunted her still), and said she would perhaps have yielded to it outright but for her visit to Wallandoon before sailing for England; and that she would certainly have done so at the third asking, had it not been for that stronger temptation to go back with Herbert to Australia. As it was, she had gone back fully determined to marry Lord Manister in the end. And if that decision had been furthered to the smallest extent by any sort of consideration for another, she did not say so; neither did she seek to defend her own behaviour at any point, for this was not Tiny's way. However, with Jack she had burned to justify herself, because love puts an end to one's ways. She had longed to tell him everything with her own lips, and to have him forgive and excuse her on

the spot. This she admitted. But she denied having known what her unreasonable longing really was. Did Ruth remember the "burning of the boats" at Cintra? Well, she had spoken the truth about Jack then; she had never "known" until the night of her last arrival at the station; she had never been quite miserable until the succeeding days. Reverting to Manister, she supposed the discovery of her departure the day after their interview—in which she had studiously refrained from revealing its imminence—had proved the last straw with him; she added that such a result had been vaguely in her mind at the time, but that she had never really admitted it among her hopes. Yet it seemed she had cured him just when she gave him up for incurable—and how thankful she was! A well-felt word about Lord Manister's future happiness, and so on, led her to her own; and Erskine slid his eye over that, but had it arrested by a loving little description of the

old home to which she was coming back for good. It was a hot wind as she wrote, and the beginning of a word dried before she got to the end of it—so she affirmed. The roof was crackling, and the shadows in the yard were like tanks of ink. Out on the run the salt-bush still looked healthy after the rains. She had given up whim-driving: the manager had put in his word. But she was taking long rides, all by herself; and the lonely grandeur of the bush appealed to her just as it had when she first came back to it nearly a year ago; and the deep sky and yellow distances and dull leaves were all her eyes required; and she thought this was the one place in the world where it would be easy to be good.

The letter came rather suddenly to its end. There were some very kind words about himself, which Erskine read more than once. Then he sat staring into the fire, until, by some fancy's trick, the red coals turned pale and took the shape of a girl's sweet face, with blemishes that

only made it sweeter, with dark hair, and generous lips, and eyes like her own Australian sky. And the eyes lightened with fun and with mischief, with recklessness, and bitterness, and temper; and in each light they were more lovable than before; but last of all they beamed clear and tranquil as the blue sea becalmed: and in their depths there shone a soul.

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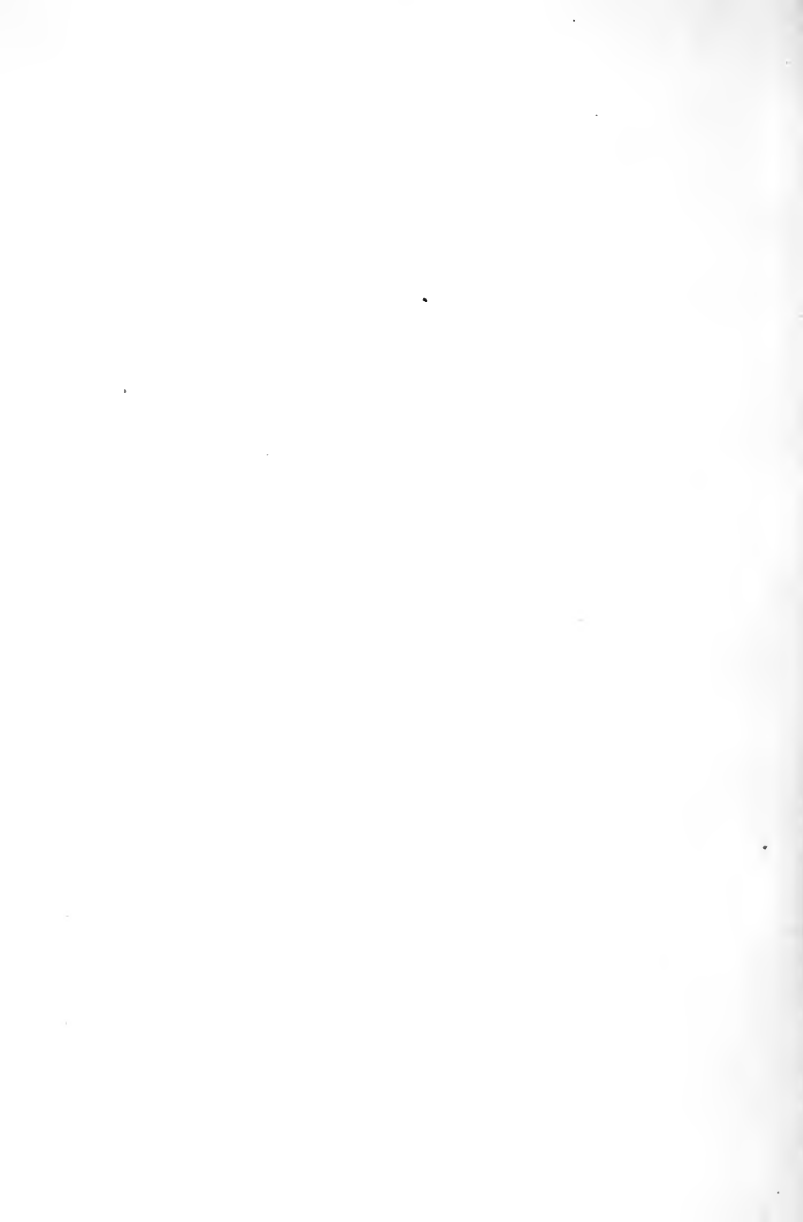
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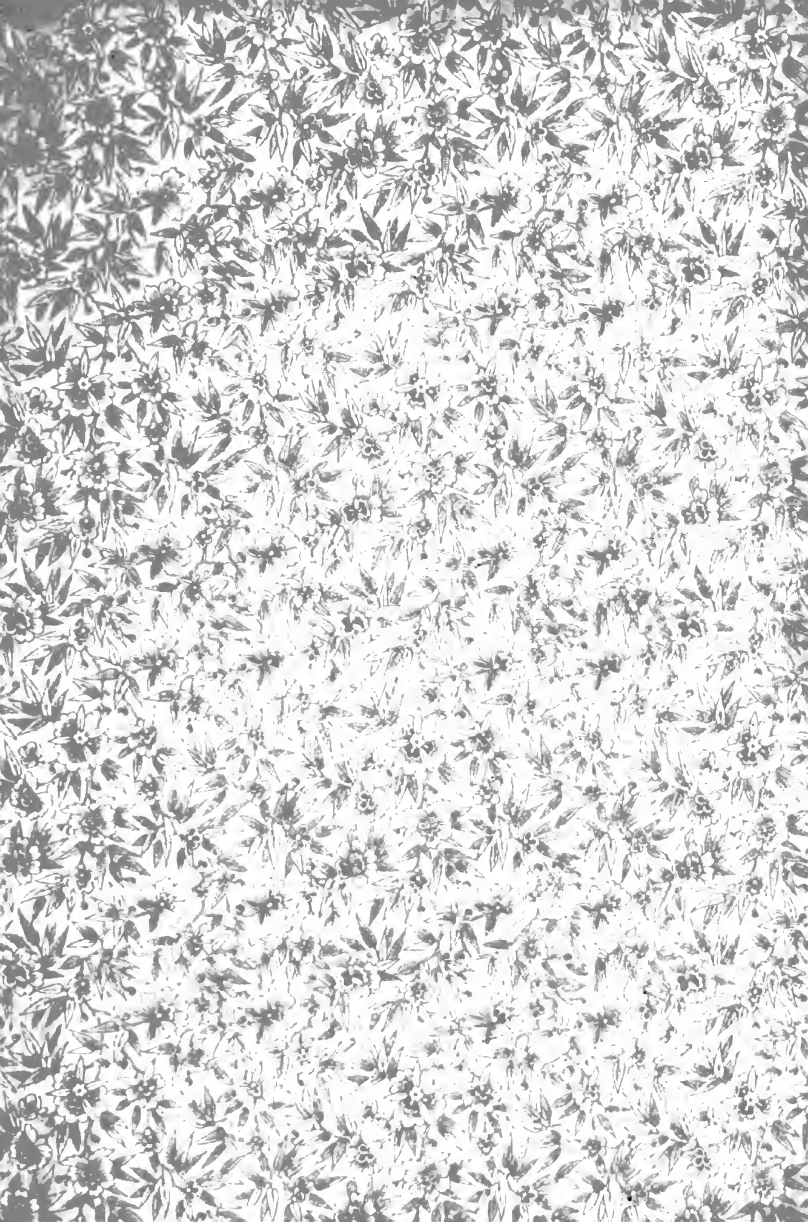
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